University of Alberta

In their shoes: Understanding the physical activity experiences of young adolescent girls

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a rich understanding of the physical activity (PA) experiences of young adolescent girls. Girls are less active than boys at all ages, and become less active throughout adolescence. Research literature suggests that social support, self-efficacy and the availability of opportunities are important correlates of girls' PA. However, little is know about the meaning PA holds for girls within their daily lives. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis guided this study and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight 6th grade girls to elicit their stories, feelings, and thoughts on PA. Five themes emerged: physical activity lets girls shine, taking care of myself inside and out, people are key, it's different for girls, and spaces and places. These themes indicate that girls' experiences are intricately embedded within their social and physical environments. Girls negotiate their PA experiences alongside awareness of gender roles, others' perceptions of their abilities, and available opportunities.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. David Dickman whose compassion, wisdom, and kindness continue to sustain and inspire me.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Context and Rationale for the Research

Engaging in regular physical activity during childhood is believed to reduce health risks associated with inactivity and enhance health during childhood and adulthood (Janssen, 2007; Timmons, Naylor, & Pfeiffer, 2007). Therefore, increasing evidence that a large proportion of children in the developed world are insufficiently active to attain subsequent health benefits is of paramount concern (Andersen et al., 2006; Biddle, Gorely, & Stensel, 2004). More specifically, national data indicates that 91% of Canadian children and youth do not meet the recommendations presented in *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth* (i.e., 90 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous activity or the equivalent of 16, 500 steps per day; Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2005). A greater understanding of the factors that contribute to children's participation is needed in order to better inform intervention efforts.

Research literature suggests that children's physical activity is influenced by intrapersonal, social, and environmental factors (Ferreira et al., 2006; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000; Spence & Lee, 2003). Variables consistently associated with child and adolescent activity include time spent outdoors, the home and school environments, perceived barriers, involvement in organized sport and activity, and self-efficacy (Campagna et al., 2002; De Bourdeaudhuij et al., 2005; Sallis et al., 2000; Strauss, Rodsilsky, Burack, & Colin, 2001). In addition, age and gender emerge repeatedly in the literature as important correlates; physical activity decreases with age (most dramatically at adolescence), and girls are less active than boys at all ages (Biddle, Gorely, & Stensel,

2004; Broderson, Steptoe, Williamson, & Wardle; 2005; Sallis et al.; Sallis, Zakarian, Hovell, & Hofstetter, 1996; Trost et al., 2002).

Factors associated with girls' physical activity include the presence of opportunities and lack of perceived barriers to activity, perceived competence, self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards the benefits of physical activity, biological factors (growth and development), and the presence of a supportive milieu (Kimiciek et al., 1996; King et al., 1992; Sallis et al., 1992). Perceived barriers include lack of time, influence of peers, parents and teachers, concern about safety, and body-centred issues (Dwyer, Allison, Goldenberg, Fein, Yoshida, & Boutilier, 2006). While this empirical evidence provides an indication of some of the social and interpersonal factors related to girls' physical activity participation, a distinct gap remains in our detailed understanding of how girls experience and interpret the myriad influences they face in their social and physical environments.

Qualitative inquiry is one approach that can provide more detailed and contextual information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the bulk of qualitative research in this area has focused on girls' experiences of sport and physical education rather than broadly defined physical activity (e.g., Brown, 2000; Gilbert, 2001; Hastie, 1998). These studies suggest that a striking dissonance exists between the opportunities provided to girls within physical education class and the activities and environments girls desire (Hastie, 1998; Humbert, 1995). Girls also appear to be highly sensitive to the external gaze of their peers, teachers, coaches, and boys (Brown, 2000; Gilbert 2001; Hastie 1998; Humbert, 1995). It warrants attention that much of the literature focuses on older adolescent females and significantly less attention has been paid to their younger

counterparts (e.g., Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Brown, 2000; Gibbons, Higgins, Gaul, & Van Gyn, 1999; Humbert, 1995; Sleap & Wormald, 2001). Thus, there is a need to look closely at young adolescent girls' experiences of broadly defined physical activity in order to effectively and strategically promote greater involvement in such a way that resonates and assimilates with the unique context of their lives.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the physical activity experiences of young adolescent girls in their daily lives while considering the complex social and physical environments in which they live. By capturing the voices of young girls, meaningful insights could be gleaned about the nature of their physical activity experiences and the meaning it holds for them. Specific research questions included:

1) How do young adolescent girls describe and interpret their physical activity experiences within their daily lives?

2) What meaning does participating in physical activity hold for them?

3) How do girls interpret the social environment in which they live?

4) In what ways do girls perceive their social environment enhances or inhibits their participation in and enjoyment of physical activity?

Significance and Potential Contribution

This study is significant in at least two important areas. First, little research currently exists that elicits the voices of young girls regarding their experiences of broadly defined physical activity. Many correlates of girls' physical activity engagement have been listed in the literature but a rich understanding of girls' experiences as described by them is lacking.

Additionally, attention has recently been called to the need for research 'with' children rather than 'on' children (Darbyshire, 2000). Therefore, a demand exists for research that engages young females and seeks to understand their experiences of physical activity and their interpretation of the factors that influence their participation. Gaining a deep and rich understanding of their experiences could complement the existing empirical literature and provide valuable insight to parents, educators, those interested in the promotion of physical activity, and those designing interventions and campaigns.

Physical Activity

For the purposes of this study, physical activity refers to "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure" (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). However, it should be noted that children may associate different concepts with physical activity that vary from the definition provided above (MacDougall, Schiller, & Darbyshire, 2004). For example, MacDougall and colleagues found that children connect distinct qualities and ideas with each of the terms 'sport', 'physical activity' and 'play'. For this reason, the interview guide used in this study opened with a question that probed girls' interpretations of the term 'physical activity'. This enabled me to adapt the language used in the interviews in such a way that accommodated the participant's interpretation of physical activity. Thus, the likelihood was increased that the participant and researcher shared a common understanding of the concept in question.

Adolescence

Steinberg (2005) defines adolescence as the transitional period between childhood and maturity, occurring roughly in the second decade of life. For the purposes of this study, the term young adolescent refers to individuals in the period of early adolescence, which spans approximately ages 10-13 (Steinberg).

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Physical inactivity is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular and other chronic diseases and is a significant public health concern throughout the industrialized world (Janssen, 2007; Sallis & Owen, 1999; Villenueve, Morrison, Craig, & Schuabel, 1998). In Canada, it is estimated that physical inactivity accounted for $2.1 billion or 2.5% of total direct health costs in 1999 (Katzmarzyk, Gledhill, & Shephard, 2000). Of particular concern are the declining rates of physical activity among Canadian children and youth. Recent literature suggests that children's physical activity participation has decreased in Canada over the past decade (King, Boyce, & King, 1999) and that 91% of Canadian children and youth do not meet the recommendations of 90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity per day outlined in *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth* (Canada Public Health Agency, 2002), the equivalent of 16,500 steps (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2005). These statistics are of significant concern as regular physical activity can help young people build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints and helps reduce fat and promote efficient function of the heart and lungs (World Health Organization, 2004). Given that physical activity patterns established in youth tend to track into adulthood (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, & Popkin, 2004; Malina, 1996), and that regular physical activity can help prevent obesity

in children (Goran, Reynolds, Lindquist, 1999), it is important to understand the factors that play a role in child and youth participation.

According to Sturm (2005) the free time of children has declined considerably over the past 20 to 30 years, which is attributable to increased time spent away from home in school, day care, and after school programs. Sturm also reports that participation in organized activities (including, but not exclusive to sport) has increased, but time spent in unstructured playtime has decreased. Furthermore, walking or biking for transportation has not changed significantly over the past few decades, but active transportation still does not constitute a major source of physical activity for youth. These findings underline the importance of considering the greater social context and understanding how societal changes work on multiple levels to influence the health and wellbeing of children.

Correlates of Child and Youth Physical Activity

Physical activity of children and youth is a complex behaviour influenced by interpersonal, social and environmental factors (Ferreira, van der Horst, Wendel-Vos, Kremers, van Lenthe, & Brug, 2006; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000). Sallis and colleagues found consistent determinants of children's (ages 3-12 years) physical activity to include sex (male), parental overweight status and activity preference, perceived barriers, facility access, and time spent outdoors. Correlates related to adolescent (ages12-18 years) participation included sex (male), perceived competence, involvement in community sports, parental and peer support, and opportunity to exercise. Similarly, a recent review of 150 published studies on environmental correlates of youth physical activity (Ferreira et al.) indicated that father's physical activity, time spent outdoors, and school physical activity-related policies were the most consistent positive correlates of

physical activity in children aged 3 – 12 years. While support from significant others, mother's education level, and family income were variables most consistently related to adolescents' participation.

Age and gender appear consistently in the literature as significant correlates of children's physical activity; participation decreases with age, most dramatically during adolescence, and girls are less active than boys at all ages (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2006; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000; Trost et al., 2002). *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth* (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002) recommends that children add 90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (equivalent to 16,500 steps) to their regular daily activities over several months. Data from the 2006 Canadian Physical Activity Levels Among Youth (Can PLAY; Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2007) study indicate that boys average 11,946 steps per day while girls average 10,735 steps per day. However, a greater proportion of girls meet the cutoff. Similar gender disparities are apparent in studies of Amish children who have shown higher levels of physical activity when compared to other Canadian children. For example, Amish boys meet the Canadian guideline at 17, 174 steps per day while Amish girls average only 13,620 steps per day (Bassett, Tremblay, Esliger, Copeland, Barnes, & Huntington, 2007).

Gender differences are further evident in the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's 2005 *Physical Activity Monitor*, which shows that teenage boys are almost twice as likely (27%) to meet international guidelines for optimal growth and development than girls (14%). Activity is also associated with lowered feelings of anxiety and depression and higher levels of self-esteem in girls (Delaney & Lee, 1995).

Given that girls' physical activity levels drop most dramatically at adolescence, and that this decrease often coincides with the transition from junior to high school, which is associated with lowered levels of self-esteem, it is important to understand the nature of girls' physical activity behaviour in early adolescent or just prior to reaching adolescence (Garcia, Pender, Antonakos, & Ronin, 1998).

Understanding Girls' Physical Activity - The Role of Biology

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of girls' physical activity behaviour, biological and evolutionary factors warrant attention. Gender differences in body composition and obesity prevalence become most marked during adolescence (Goran, Gower, Nagy, & Johnson, 1998). Goran and colleagues investigated changes in energy expenditure and physical activity in girls and boys ages 5.5 to 9.5 years over 5 years. The authors hypothesized that girls would demonstrate a significant decline in energy expenditure immediately before adolescence as an energy conserving mechanism and that this conservation would occur via changes in Activity-related Energy Expenditure (AEE). Total Energy Expenditure (TEE) declined in girls from ages 6.5 – 9.5, while it increased in boys each year. Resting energy expenditure was maintained for both. Gender differences in TEE over time were explained by a 50% decrease in AEE. This decrease was expressed as kcal per day and hours per day of reported physical activity. Reduction in TEE occurred despite a continued increase in fat and fat-free mass that would be expected to contribute to increased energy expenditure. Results suggest the existence of an energy conserving mechanism through reduced physical activity before puberty in girls, thus contributing to girls' lower levels of participation. While these findings do not consider the social and physical environment changes that may

accompany puberty (e.g., limited access to structured activities, decreased social desirability of physical activity), they do illuminate the need to target research and intervention efforts before puberty.

There is also some evidence to suggest that hormonal influences are implicated in gender differences in children's engagement of rough and tumble play -- e.g., vigorous behaviours such as wrestling, kicking and tumbling that expend high amounts of energy (Pelligrini & Smith, 1998). DiPietro (1981) found that boys engage in rough and tumble play more frequently than girls. However, androgenized girls (females that received abnormally high levels of the male hormone androgen in the womb due to genetic defects) prefer male activities more than do nonandrogenized girls (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972).

Further insight into evolutionary influences on physical activity-related gender differences is provided by a sophisticated examination of comparative data on hunter-gatherer groups and the sexual division of labour (Panter-Brick, 2002). Overall workloads and energy expenditures of three forager groups, the !Kung San, Ache and Igoolik Eskimo, were expressed as physical activity levels (PAL). Gender differences in overall physical activity were small, countering common conceptions that a hunter-gatherer division of labour would imply notable differences in male/female energy expenditure. Similarly, when PAL values were compared between foragers and farmers, considerable overlap was found, which contradicts a common assumption that male/female differences in energy expenditure were reduced in the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Instead, it is suggested that male/female differences in overall workloads are extremely variable across ecological contexts, discounting the idea that

women's participation in manual labour was constrained by inferior physical abilities. Thus, the stereotypic view of "man the hunter, woman the gatherer" (Panter-Brick, 2002, p. 639) has been challenged by more detailed models that explore how energetic trade-offs may be inextricably linked with reproductive events, social support, and resource selection.

In summary, these findings remind us to avoid being quick to dismiss gender differences as 'natural' and to be wary of overly simplistic explanations. Together, these studies suggest that biological and evolutionary considerations may provide one piece of the puzzle. However an inclusive understanding of physical activity-related gender differences requires consideration of the complex social environment in which we live. A number of interpersonal, social environment, and physical environment variables related to girls' activity are outlined in the following section.

Perceived Competence and Self-Efficacy

As mentioned previously, self-efficacy and perceived competence appear as consistent correlates of girls' physical activity participation. Self-efficacy is a construct derived from Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and refers to one's confidence in one's ability to perform a certain task in a given situation. Perceived competence emerged mainly from theories of competence motivation (e.g., Harter, 1981) and is largely self-evaluative, that is, it refers to one's perception of competence in a certain domain (e.g., physical competence), not one's actual competence. Perceived competence is believed to be intricately linked to one's motivation to engage in an activity or task (Harter). Literature reveals perceived competence to be a distinguishing factor between girls who do and do not participate in physical activity and sport.

Specifically, low levels of competence are associated with lower levels of sport and physical activity participation among girls (Eccles & Harold, 1991; Sallis et al., 2000; Welk, Corbin, & Lewis, 1995). A study by Welk and colleagues (1995) found that girls who participated in sport were more likely to positively evaluate their ability to perform successfully and had higher physical self-perceptions than non-athletic girls. Conversely, girls cite lack of sufficient skills as a reason for choosing not to participate (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, Duda and colleagues (1995) found that females perceived themselves as less competent than their male counterparts in physical activity.

Eccles and Harold (1991) investigated self-perceptions and activity perceptions of 3,000 grade 6 and 7 students for math, English, and physical activity. Results showed that girls' beliefs in their physical ability and their assessment of whether or not they could successfully conduct certain tasks were major determinants of attempting the activity. Culp (1998) also found that that poor self-concept was a major barrier to physical activity and leisure activities. This literature suggests that perceptions of competency are a salient factor in girls' decision making around participation in physical activity and sport.

Similarly, perceptions of self-efficacy have been identified in the literature as an important correlate of self-reported physical activity among adolescent girls (Motl, et al., 2002; Saunders, Motl, Dowda, Dishman, & Pate, 2004). For instance, self-efficacy was the most significant correlate of moderate and vigorous physical activity and accounted for girls' intentions to be physically active (Motl et al.). Dishman and colleagues (2004) recently reported that the positive effect of a physical activity intervention targeting adolescent girls was partially mediated by increased efficacy beliefs about physical

activity participation. Additionally, Allison, Dwyer, and Makin (1999) explored the relationship between physical activity self-efficacy and participation in vigorous physical activity by high school students. Their results showed that self-efficacy predicts physical activity participation. This underlines the potential impact increased self-efficacy can have on physical activity and calls for further investigation on mediating factors of girls' physical activity self-efficacy.

Social Support

Social support (parents and peers) also plays a prominent role in girls' physical activity behaviour. Eccles and Harold (1991) suggest that support from significant others affects girls' opportunities for sport and physical activity participation in three ways. First, support can occur through exposure, encouragement, and facilitation of available opportunities. Second, parental assessment of the value and appropriateness of physical activity for young women determines the types of opportunities provided to the girls. Finally, attitudes, values, and behaviour of significant others mediate girls' expectations for achievement in physical activity and thus, behaviour choices. The importance of parental support is further demonstrated by Welk, Wood, and Morse (2003) who found parental encouragement and facilitation (e.g., providing opportunities for physical activity) to be predictors of youth's interest and involvement in physical activity. This same study found that boys perceived more parental facilitation than girls. Anderssen and Wold (1992) hypothesize that direct parental support for girls may be more influential (although less common) than support for boys. This hypothesis is supported by Brustad (1996) who suggests that increased encouragement for physical activity and sport participation is required for girls because of social norms that do not support sport

participation. Furthermore, parent-child play interactions also appear to differ by gender, with boys being exposed to more physical play than girls. MacDonald and Parke (1986) found that parents, particularly fathers, engage more often in rigorous physical play with boys than girls, suggesting that boys receive a more intensive and prolonged exposure to this type of activity than girls. These findings indicate differences in the levels and styles of parental support girls and boys experience for physical activity, which could potentially mediate girls' perceptions of their abilities, opportunities provided to them, and their behaviour choices.

In addition to parental support, peer support and behaviour is a prominent determinant of girls' physical activity engagement, particularly as they get older (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; Coakley & White, 1992; Voorhees, Birnbaum, Johnson, & Saksvig, 2005). The more active friends a girl has, the more likely she is to be active (Schofield, Mummery, Schofield, & Hopkins, 2007). Voorhees et al. (2005) found that frequency of activity with friends was a significant predictor of girls' physical activity engagement. Furthermore, a recent study that investigated the relationships between social support, physical activity and sedentary behaviour among grade 6 girls showed that friend physical activity participation, and friend and family encouragement were positively related to moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Springer, Kelder, Hoeschler, 2006). Friend encouragement was the only variable related to vigorous physical activity. Thus, the unique friendships formed by girls could be important considerations in the planning of future research studies and intervention designs as peers reinforce social norms. However, as suggested previously, parental influences could lay the groundwork for increased engagement in physical activity later in life. Furthermore, the type of

support (e.g., parental and peer) appears to vary in its importance according to age and development.

Perceived Barriers

In addition to social support and perceptions of competence, perceived barriers are an important correlate of girls' physical activity. Tergerson and King (2002) examined girls' and boys' perceived cues, benefits, and barriers to exercising in a sample 535 high students. Girls reported time constraints, lack of motivation, and not having access to facilities and places to exercise as the most common barriers. Benefits identified by girls revolved around appearance and included 'to stay in shape,' 'to lose weight', and 'to become more physically attractive to others'. This study provides some indication of adolescent girls' perceptions of exercise, it merits noting that the term 'exercise' may not capture young people's thoughts and perceptions on more broadly defined physical activity or even sport (Schiller, MacDougall, & Darbyshire, 2005). Furthermore, the pre-determined categories provided to the participants by the researchers may have prevented these adolescents from describing other perceived barriers or benefits not encompassed by those on the questionnaire. A limitation the current study will overcome.

Dwyer and colleagues (2006) used qualitative methods (focus groups) to explore adolescent girls' perceived barriers to moderate to vigorous activity. Similar to the findings reported by Tergerson and King (2002), barriers included lack of time and inaccessibility to facilities. In addition, involvement in technology-related activities, influence of peers, parents and teachers, concerns about safety and body-centred issues emerged as important barriers (Dwyer et al.). These results further illuminate the complex

relationship between the intrapersonal, social and physical environments and physical activity behaviour among girls.

The Role of Theory

The research literature reviewed previously illuminates a number of important correlates of girls' physical activity behaviour. According to the Behavioral Epidemiology Framework (Sallis & Owen, 1998; Sallis, Owen, & Fotheringham, 2000), identifying factors (particularly modifiable factors) that influence physical activity levels among different subgroups of individuals is an important step that precedes the development and implementation of interventions. Comprehensive and deliberate consideration of these factors facilitates intervention efforts and can be guided by the appropriate use of theory. Indeed, many determinants of physical activity behaviour have been conceptualized within a number of health behaviour theories (see Connor & Norman, 2006; Glanz, Lewis, & Rimer, 2002). SCT (Bandura, 1986) has been used extensively in research examining physical activity behaviour among children and youth (e.g., Allison, Dwyer, & Makin, 1999; De Bourdeaudhuij & Sallis, 2002; Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burak, & Colin, 2001). SCT imagines human behaviour as a triadic reciprocality in which behavioural, cognitive and personal factors, and environmental events operate as interacting determinants of each other (Bandura, 1986). According to SCT, behavioural changes are mediated by a cognitive mechanism knows as self-efficacy expectation. Outcomes expectancy (OE) is another central construct defined by SCT that refers to a person's evaluation that a given behaviour will lead to a specific outcome. SCT posits that an individual is most likely to perform a particular behaviour when she/he feels confident that they can perform the given task and associates completing the

task with positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Much of the literature discussed can be situated within this theoretical framework as self-efficacy appears consistently as an important correlate.

Ecological Approaches

While SCT considers external influences (e.g., barriers) of behaviour as well as individual influences, this model does not explicitly discuss how external influences on behaviour (e.g., the built environment) can have unmediated effects on behaviour. Increased research attention has been paid to alternative approaches to understanding physical activity behaviour, particularly those that consider the direct influences of social and physical environmental factors in addition to individual influences (Sallis & Owen, 2002; Spence & Lee, 2003). Social ecological models of behaviour provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that considers the unique interactions between personal, social, and environmental influences and how they work to inhibit or facilitate physical activity (Sallis & Owen, 2002; Spence & Lee, 2003). Within social ecological models, the environment is defined as the space outside of the individual (Sallis & Owen, 2002). The behaviour setting is the social and physical situation in which behaviour occurs. Levels of influence within ecological models vary in proximity to the individual and can be categorized as intra-individual or extra-individual. Intra-individual influences refer to attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of the individual. Extra-individual influences include social and cultural environments, policy, and the built environment (Spence & Lee, 2003). Ecological models assume that these levels are interdependent and that a change in one can directly affect the other. Spence and Lee's (2003) ecological model of physical activity (EMPA) is largely adapted from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems

theory (1979) which claims that social systems are ecological influences that impact child development.

Many of the correlates of girls' physical activity behaviour described previously can be located within one or multiple levels of environment described by social ecological models of behaviour. However, ecological approaches examine more closely the interactions between these multiple variables and how the various levels of influence work within the individual's unique social and environmental context. Recent research addressing physical activity participation in children and youth draws upon a social ecological premise. For instance, focus groups were used to gain insight into various influences on children's use of public open spaces such as parks, and green spaces (Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, 2007). Results were consistent with ecological models of behaviour and revealed that children's use of open spaces was influenced by a mixture of interpersonal, social, and environmental factors such as personal motivation, urban design features, and presence of friends and playmates.

The Youth Physical Activity Promotion Model

Welk (1999) adopted the concept of multiple levels of environmental influence to create a model of physical activity promotion for children and youth. The Youth Physical Activity Promotion model (YPAP) provides a conceptual framework based on the unique developmental, psychological, and behavioural characteristics of children and considers the influence of personal, social, and environmental variables. The model unites constructs from theoretical frameworks used abundantly in the literature to understand and describe children's physical activity behaviour such as Bandura's SCT (1986) and

expectancy-value approaches (e.g., attitudes and social influences, perceived behavioural control).

The YPAP is anchored by demographic factors (e.g., age, sex, socio-economic status) and places them at the base of the model as they will directly and indirectly influence how a certain individual will process various influences (Welk, 1999). From there, correlates of child and youth participation are encompassed by the three central constructs of the YPAP. These include predisposing factors (variables that collectively increase the likelihood that an individual will be physically active); reinforcing factors (variables that reinforce a child's physical activity); and enabling factors (variables that allow children and youth to be physically active). Predisposing factors encompass the *Is it worth it?* component which assesses the benefits and costs of participating in a physical activity. The second component is *Am I able?* which incorporates self evaluation such as perceived competence and self-efficacy. The model hypothesizes that these components will be directly and indirectly influenced by the child's personal attributes and social environment. Reinforcing factors primarily refer to variables such as parental and peer support and attitudes to physical activity. In turn reinforcing factors influence the assessment of *Am I able?* and *Is it worth it?* Finally, enabling factors include variables such as the child's level of fitness and access to equipment, parks, and facilities (built environment). According to Welk, enabling factors are thought to influence physical activity both directly and indirectly. The result is a comprehensive framework that takes into considerations the various factors correlated to children's physical activity and recognizes a given population's unique characteristics (Welk).

While the YPAP has not yet been directly tested in its entirety in any published study that I am aware of, the Children's Physical Activity Correlates Scale (CPAC) has demonstrated predictive ability (Schaben, Welk, Jones-Matre, & Hensley, 2005). The CPAC scale captures psychosocial correlates of physical activity and was developed to assess the predisposing and reinforcing factors described in the YPAP. The predisposing factor reflects key SCT constructs of "outcome expectations" and "efficacy expectations." The reinforcing factor of parental influence captures modeling, social support, and social influence aspects of SCT. The CPAC was recently assessed for its utility in predicting physical activity behaviour with students in grades 7 – 9 and results showed the scale to predict over 30% of the variance in physical activity for both middle and high school students (Schaben et al.).

Girls' Experiences in Physical Education, Sport, and Physical Activity

While empirical studies provide an indication of the social and interpersonal factors related to girls' physical activity participation, a distinct gap remains in our detailed understanding of how girls experience and interpret the myriad influences they face in their social and physical environments in relation to physical activity participation. Qualitative inquiry is one approach that can provide more detailed and contextual information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The bulk of qualitative research in this area has largely focused on sport and physical education rather than broadly defined physical activity (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Brown, 2000; Gibbons, Higgins, Gaul, & Van gun, 1999; Gilbert, 2001; Hastie, 1998; Humbert, 1995). There is also very limited qualitative data on young adolescent girls. This population is of particular interest as they have not yet experienced the complete physical and emotional transition of

puberty. It would be valuable to learn more about the experiences of girls just before they reach the age when physical activity levels decline dramatically.

Brown (2000) and Waters (1997) used qualitative methods such as interviews to gain insight into junior school girls' (ages 13-15) experiences of physical education. In both studies, teachers and other significant leaders (e.g. coaches) emerged as salient influences on the girls' perceptions of physical education, decisions to participate, and the girls' level of enjoyment. Waters found that girls placed great value on connecting with the teachers. Girls said they would be more likely to engage in a new activity if their relationship with the teacher was positive and focused not solely on skill acquisition. The social context and overall tone of interactions with others was very important to them as was feeling comfortable.

Humbert (1995) employed a case study approach with older girls (grades 9-12) to understand their experiences of physical education. Through repeated interviews and other qualitative modes of inquiry, Humbert found that participants considered the structure and environment of physical education classes to be limiting and incongruent with their interests and needs. Girls wished for more diverse activities than the traditional ones that were offered. The girls were highly sensitive to the nature of their relationship with the teacher and to the level of the support they received. Girls reported feeling concerned about being ridiculed by classmates or embarrassed in front of them. Interestingly, participants did voice an interest and desire to be physically active but felt available options did not accommodate their needs and interests. These findings suggest that older adolescent girls value physical activity but have difficulty identifying and

accessing environments in which they feel comfortable and able to engage, at least within school physical education.

Similarly, Gibbons and colleagues (1999) conducted focus group interviews to learn more about high school girls' experiences of physical education. Their findings suggest that girls want an increased variety and choice of physical activities. Girls also expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum's emphasis on sport and voiced a desire for more personal fitness related content. Satisfaction and enjoyment of physical education (particularly co-ed) appears to be greatly influenced by class content and the quality of social interactions. Messages received by influential adults (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches) also emerged as being important to the girls involvement in physical education.

While much of the qualitative literature in this area reveals girls' dissatisfaction with physical education, a recent study provides an alternative perspective (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006). The study was conducted from a feminist, poststructuralist paradigm and used qualitative methods to examine the ways in which high school girls participated or resisted physical education. Overall, girls enjoyed and valued physical activity. Participants were aware of common sense ideas about appropriate and inappropriate physical activities for girls and of stereotypes about girls' and boys' participation in sport and physical education. Awareness of these attitudes enabled many of the girls to actively reject or accept them in relation to their own behaviour; it both limited and encouraged participation in class. Consistent with the studies described above, curricular choice emerged as an important factor in girls' decisions and experiences as girls perceived limited choices in physical education in relation to their male counterparts.

Themes highlighted by these studies pose the question of what can be done to better respond to girls needs? Schools are an important part of girls' social environments and it appears that schools do not always provide satisfactory physical activity experiences. Additionally, having choice and the availability of appealing options appears to play a key role in girls' physical activity experiences.

Qualitative research has also tried to capture young women's perceptions of sport involvement. Gilbert (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with girls 8 to 13 years of age to determine what factors led to more satisfying experiences within organized sports. Her results suggest that the support and encouragement of parents and other influential adults (e.g., coaches, community group leaders) as well as feeling skilled at the sport were associated with entrance into sport. The girls were asked to share their best and worst memories of sport participation. The worse memories revolved around feelings of embarrassment that stemmed largely from letting team mates down and not performing well. Positive memories consisted of doing their best, having fun, winning, accomplishing skills, and being encouraged. This reveals once again girls' sensitivity to the social environment, peer evaluation, and the quality of their relationship with influential adults.

In co-ed sport situations Hastie (1998) found that girls perceived boys to make better players and thought they were more serious about sports. Girls also thought the boys were 'bossy' and took control more than the girls did. However girls reported preferring to play co-ed sports than same-sex sports. This study raises questions around gender roles in physical activity participation. Why do girls perceive boys to make better players? Why are boys 'bossy'? Do boys feel more comfortable in this domain than girls?

It would have been interesting to ask the girls if they wished to have more control than they perceived themselves as having. The question also arises, what larger socialization factors are at work?

Overall, the qualitative sport and physical education literature suggests that girls are influenced by personal, social, and environmental factors, consistent with the YPAP. They are highly sensitive to the external gaze of their teammates and peers, coaches, and boys. Often there is an incongruence noted between girls' desired level of participation, the opportunities provided to them, and their satisfaction and ease in their social environment. Both sport and physical education have an evaluative component (e.g., they both focus on skill acquisition and performance) that could moderate the heightened concern girls experience about how they appear to others.

While qualitative research that examines girls' perceptions of physical activity is fairly limited, more is emerging. For instance, adolescent girls (15 years of age) expressed positive perceptions and experiences of physical activity outside of school when compared to experiences of physical education in a qualitative study that examined young women's choices of physical activity behaviour both in and out of school (Flintoff & Scranton, 2001). Sleap and Wormald (2001) explored older adolescent females' (ages 16-17) perceptions of physical activity through focus groups. Many girls expressed an interest in physical activity and acknowledged its value for health and wellbeing. However, many girls also shared negative experiences of physical education at school. This might suggest that physical education plays a particularly salient role in young women's perceptions and future involvement in physical activity outside of school.

A recent study gathered qualitative data to explore the factors influencing physically active leisure in children and youth (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). Three age groups were identified, elementary school (grades 3- 4), junior school (grades 6 -7) and secondary school. Parental influence was a significant influence through all age groups and gender distinctions were observed at the junior school and secondary school levels. These students believed that girls were less active and that fewer opportunities to participate in sport existed for girls. Other barriers to participation identified by older adolescent girls include lack of time, involvement in technology-related activities, influence of peers, parents and teachers, concern about safety, inaccessibility of facilities and cost of using them, competition, and body image issues (Dwyer, Allison, Goldenberg, Fein, Yoshida, & Boutelier, 2006).

Interestingly, differences have been noted between girls' and boy's perceptions of girls physical activity. Vu and colleagues (2006) studied the differences in girls' and boys' perceptions of girls' physical activity behaviours in a large sample of middle school boys and girls (grades 7-8). Inquiry focused on participants' perceptions of physically active girls, perceived barriers to girls' physical activity, and perceived motivators for girls' participation in physical activity. Girls were more likely than boys to view active girls in a positive light, using words such as 'cool' to describe them. Conversely, boys used words like 'aggressive' and 'tomboy' to describe active girls. Boys were extremely influential in shaping girls' perceptions and beliefs about physical activity as girls expressed that negative reactions from boys (e.g., name calling and teasing) were important reasons why they were not more physically active. Girls also reported lack of motivation, being shy, and time constraints as factors that prevented

them from being more active. Boys thought that girls were the ones who posed restrictions on their own physical activity behaviours by being concerned about their appearance, getting hurt, or getting sweaty. Girls' perceived motivators were parental and family involvement and more diverse opportunities that met their interests, for example a dance session over a baseball game. An interesting contradiction arises from this data. Boys appeared to perceive the girls as their own obstacle, while girls reported being so concerned about boys' reactions to them such that it inhibits their physical activity levels. It appears as though girls and young women can be 'immobilized' directly and indirectly through limited opportunities and their perceptions of societal messages and ideas about their physical activity.

In general, the studies reviewed suggest there may not be a good 'fit' between girls' interests, the opportunities available to them, and their level of comfort in their social environment. It appears that the options and opportunities for girls to engage in activities they are interested in, and in which they feel confident and encouraged, are limited. Furthermore, in most of these studies it is evident that girls are very aware of and sensitive to the evaluation of others, including peers, teachers, and boys. What is more interesting and perhaps more pressing is to understand how girls describe and interpret these situations. How are girls interpreting their social and physical environments and translating it into physical activity behaviour choices? More specifically, how do girls that are relatively inactive describe their physical activity experiences and what meaning does physical activity hold for them?

In addition, the studies listed here focus primarily on adolescent girls, leaving the voices of younger girls unheard. It would be helpful to know more about the experiences

of girls before the decline in physical activity that occurs at puberty (Goran et al.). It can be assumed that the messages and experiences they accumulate up until adolescence impacts significantly on their physical activity choices. Insight into how those messages and experiences fit into their life prior to puberty could provide valuable information about this population, Therefore, this study considers these existing gaps in the literature and aims to understand how physical activity fits into the after-school and weekend time of young adolescent girls. Understanding in this area could perhaps help parents, educators, administrators, and policy officials create a broad environment that is more conducive to physical activity participation and makes it a better 'fit' for girls.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

A Case for Qualitative Inquiry

According to Patton (2002), the research question should drive the selection of an appropriate research method. The purpose of my study was to gain a rich understanding of young adolescent girls' experiences of physical activity and the meanings they ascribe to it. In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to elicit girls' voices and stories about their perceptions and beliefs relating to physical activity. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that qualitative research acknowledges and illuminates the importance and uniqueness of the participant's experience. Where quantitative research is often employed to demonstrate correlates or determinants of a phenomenon using statistical analysis and mathematical significance, qualitative research "…examines people's words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 2). As mentioned previously, a body of empirical literature exists that indicates some of the important correlates of girls' engagement in physical activity. However little is known about how young adolescent girls describe and interpret their physical activity experiences. Given Denzin and Lincoln's argument that "… qualitative research "…involve[s] an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter…which attempt[s] to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them…" (p. 3), a qualitative method was selected as being the most appropriate for gaining insight into this topic and for making a unique contribution to the literature.

Method – Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2003) is largely derived from the epistemological groundings of phenomenology and hermeneutic inquiry (Smith & Eatough, 2006). Phenomenology is a complex philosophic tradition that concerns itself with the exploration of phenomena as they present themselves in the conscious experience; it "…aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Several different phenomenological orientations exist from which IPA has evolved. German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) can be considered the father of phenomenology (Laverty, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1983) as he turned from mathematics to philosophy in pursuit of the true meaning of being. Husserl was primarily concerned with the study of phenomena as they appeared through the consciousness, and viewed consciousness as a co-constituted dialogue between the individual and the world (Husserl, 1970; Valle et al., 1989). He believed that people could access the consciousness by intentionally and directly observing and grasping phenomena (Polkinghorne, 1989). Central to Husserl's phenomenology was the concept of *epoché*, or the act of bracketing out the external world and one's own biases in order to truly see or grasp the essences of the lived experience. To Husserl, *epoché* was necessary when understanding the life world.

German theologian Martin Heidigger followed closely in Husserl's footsteps but eventually moved away from Husserl's position towards his own philosophy of knowing and understanding which gave rise to hermeneutic phenomenology. This phenomenological orientation maintains that all forms of human awareness, and thus all

descriptions of phenomena, are interpretive (Heidigger, 1927/1962; van Manen, 1997). In other words, the individual is not separate from consciousness and is therefore always interpreting 'being in this world' (Heidigger). *Epoché* is not considered in hermeneutic phenomenology as this practice is counter intuitive to hermeneutics' interpretive foundation.

The underlying goal of IPA is to 'explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world…" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51). This method provides a focused and streamlined strategy for understanding how individuals perceive and interpret specific experiences within the context of their daily lives. IPA is phenomenological in its approach in that it is concerned with individuals' subjective reports of the lived experience and the researcher attempts to access the 'participant's personal world' (Smith, 1996, p. 218). IPA is hermeneutic in that it requires interpretive engagement on the part of the researcher. The dynamic process between the researcher and the interpretation of individual accounts is explained by Smith (1996):

> Access is both dependant on and complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions which are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretive activity. (p. 264).

Smith and Osborn (2003) refer to this process as a double hermeneutic as the participant is trying to make sense of their world, while the researchers is trying to grasp *how* the participant is making sense of their world. Therefore, as the researcher I played a dynamic role in interpreting the participants' realities, but maintained adequate distance from participants in order to allow the descriptions to 'speak for themselves' (Smith & Eatough, 2006, p. 325) *Researcher's Statement*

This research is motivated by own life experiences and sustained involvement and interest in physical activity. I studied classical ballet and modern dance throughout my childhood and young adulthood and taught dance to children for many years. Within this capacity I witnessed both the joy and fulfillment many girls derived from dance and the struggles many of them faced as they attempted to balance the new social, physical, and work-related pressures that accompany adolescence. If a student failed to return the subsequent year I would wonder why. Did she no longer enjoy dance? Was she too busy? Were her parents unable to pay for lessons? These questions prompted me to reflect on my own relationship with physical activity and its role in my life. Physical activity has always been important to me, but it has not always been simple. In fact, it has been marked by contradictions. I was passionate about dance and felt at ease in the studio, but was intimidated by the social dynamics of organized sport. I enjoyed the sensation of running down a field and handling a ball, but was disinterested in game rules and strategies. I felt at home on a stage and could dance to the point of exhaustion, but experienced stage fright in physical education class in front of my peers. In addition, I was very sensitive to the larger social messages around what was 'appropriate' physical activity behavior for girls and even more sensitive to societal expectations of the feminine body ideal. I have been plagued by guilt and thoughts of 'I should exercise', but just as often physical activity has provided a source of solace, of strength.

In hindsight I realize that I was feeling and continue to experience the indirect effects of my broader social, cultural, and political environment. After reading the literature and reflecting on my own anecdotal experiences and informal conversations with girls and women of all ages, it strikes me that involvement in physical activity

involves a constant inner negotiation of a variety of personal, social, and cultural factors. Often there is a feeling of conflicting motivations, interests and perceptions about what one feels they can do, should do or want to do. In my conversations with girls there appears to be a discrepancy between what girls would like to do, what opportunities they feel are available to them, and what they feel they are capable of doing. Yet physical activity has benefits that include and extend far beyond physical health (Pelligrini & Smith, 1998). For this reason, I would like to understand in more detail what it is like for young girls to engage in broadly defined physical activity, as described by them. I hope that it will become easier for children, and in particular girls, to engage in physical activity in a way that optimizes their health and wellbeing.

Participants

Data were obtained from 9 female students who were 10 to 11 years of age. All of the girls were in the same grade 6 class, lived in the same suburban town on the outskirts of Edmonton, and were or had been engaged in one extracurricular physical activity within the past year. Each participant completed one in-depth interview and one member checking interview for a total of 18 interviews. One participant withdrew partway through the study resulting in a final sample of 8 girls.

Sampling and Participant Recruitment

IPA calls for purposeful homogeneous sampling (Patton, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The goal is to obtain abundant and rich interpretative information from a small number of cases, as opposed to 'thinner' data from a larger sample. IPA does not dictate a specific sample size and acknowledges that appropriate samples can range from 1, 5, to 15 or more participants (Smith & Eatough, 2006). However, Smith and Eatough (2006)

recommend that sample size be determined by considering: the richness of the individual cases; the ways which the cases will be compared or contrasted and; pragmatic factors. Given that I was trying to understand the range of experiences girls have in relationship to physical activity and that I hoped to obtain fairly rich accounts, I decided upon on an initial goal of 7 to 10 girls. This number provided me with a manageable number of cases yet was large enough to yield adequate richness and detail.

Access Procedure

Permission for this study to take was granted by the Principal of the school and by the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation's Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. Prior to the commencement of this study, I met in person with the Principal and the teacher of the class. I explained my interest in hearing the girls' stories about their experiences of physical activity and articulated the goals of my research.

According to Punch (2000), when conducting research with children as much time as possible should be spent with children in their familiar environment(s). Thus, I participated in the girls' physical education and other classes for 3 weeks prior to the commencement of the study so that I could be naturalized within their daily context. To further build rapport, I participated in outdoor schoolyard activities over the lunch hour as a way to engage in informal conversations with the children and to become a more familiar part of their daily context.

After spending 3 weeks at the school, consent forms (see Appendix II) and a parent information letter (see Appendix I) outlining the goals of the study were distributed. The girls were asked to return the consent forms once their parents had signed them. All 9 girls returned signed consent forms. In addition, child assent was

obtained prior to the interview as stated by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,* Article 2.7. I verbally explained to the girls' what was involved with the study and outlined to them that they could decide not to participate and/or to withdraw at any time with no consequences (see Appendix III). All 9 girls provided their assent by way of participating in the interview.

It should also be noted that I anticipated preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews would lead to further questions, thus all participants were invited to partake in a member checking interview (Patton, 2002). This was explained to parents and participants at the onset of the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews during October and November, 2007. Semi-structured interviews have been identified as the most exemplary method of data collection for IPA studies (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith, 1995). Within this technique, the interviewer develops rapport, places minimal emphasis on the ordering of questions, probes interesting ideas elicited in the interview and follows the respondents' interests or concerns (Patton, 2002; Smith, 1995). In semi-structured interviews, the interview is guided by the general areas and topics of interest but inherent flexibility exists to allow the interviewer and interviewee the freedom to explore any areas of interest that may arise (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews attempt to "enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent" (Smith & Osborn, p. 57). The semi-structured interview technique supported the phenomenological methodology chosen for this study because in phenomenology the

researcher is interested in the meanings the participant makes of his or her experiences (van Manen, 1997).

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), the interview guide should be organized in a funnel design (Smith & Osborn, 2003), moving from the most broad questions to more specific and from least sensitive to more sensitive. Spradley (1979) recommends the use of three types of questions, 'thinking', 'knowing' and 'feeling', to elicit meaningful responses from participants. Therefore, the first part of the guide included questions about girls' general perceptions of physical activity and of their experiences. Questions on the second part of the guide explored what the girls do and do not like about physical activity and sought to access their descriptions of the meaning physical activity holds for them (see Appendix IV). Elaboration probes and follow up questions were used to obtain fuller descriptions where necessary and to enhance the richness of the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2002). The interview guide was piloted with two girls of the same age as the study participants. Overall, the girls considered the questions to be appropriate and relevant. However, three questions were reworded according to their suggestions.

Interviewing children presents a unique set of challenges and considerations (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; Irwin & Johnson, 2005). According to Docherty and Sandelowski, it is important to consider appropriate content, timing and overall structure of the interviews when interviewing children. Therefore, I made sure that none of the interviews lasted longer than 30 minutes as the girls' appeared to lose focus after this amount of time had lapsed. Additionally, some of the girls responded well to an open-ended question at the beginning of the interview, whereas others did not respond as

openly. In these situations I followed recommendations made by Irwin and Johnson (2005) and alternated more closed questions with open-ended questions to help the participant feel more at ease sharing their thoughts and feelings. I also allowed a few minutes at the beginning of each interview for the participant to play with the audio recorder and hear their voice played back to them in efforts to increase their comfort level and their feelings of being an active participant in the process (Irwin & Johnson).

Throughout data collection and analysis, I adopted the stance of empathetic neutrality which is recommended by Patton (2002) as a way to promote rigour. Empathetic neutrality refers to achieving a nuanced balance between having empathy for the participants while taking a neutral stance towards their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. It is the act of being at once compassionate and nonjudgmental that helps to build rapport and increases the researcher's ability to be open to what they hear and learn from the other person (Patton). Adopting empathetic neutrality was very important in this study for several reasons. As a woman, I have my own bittersweet memories and experiences of what it meant to be physically active as a young girl. My emotional arousal was high at times when listening to particularly poignant stories of participants' positive and negative experiences. In these cases compassion came easily and it was the neutrality, the ability to take a step back, which was challenging. I became practiced at engaging in a constant inner dialogue that involved checking in with my emotions while staying attuned to the participant. Some of their stories resonated with my own experiences and memories and it was important for me to ensure that I was attending to their experience and not mine. While challenging at times, empathetic neutrality did help me gain a more open rapport with some of the girls and that openness resulted in new and

fresh insights that extended beyond my perceptions and experiences. By taking an empathetically neutral stance I truly came to see the girls' as the experts and my own experiences merely provided contextual insight and a point of reference for the data.

Site Selection

All interviews were conducted in two locations at the school. When possible, a small conference room was used that was comfortable and quiet. Four of the interviews were conducted in an empty classroom when the conference room was unavailable. Interviews lasted anywhere from 18–30 minutes and were audio recorded with permission of the participant and her parent(s).

Other Activities

Activities that engage children in creative thought about the topic of interest prior to the interview may help to provoke thought and open communication lines between the researcher and participant (Ellis, 1998; Punch, 2002). Examples of such activities include creating lists, drawings, collages, photographs and stories (Ellis). Therefore, prior to commencing data collection, I participated in the grade 6 health classes and led a brainstorming activity that asked all members of the class to share their thoughts on physical activity by coming up with related words. The words 'sport' and 'play' were identified as two distinct categories and students were then asked to think of words and ideas they associated with 'sport' and 'play'. In addition, the class engaged in a creative art exercise in which they created computer generated collages that reflected their favorite physical activities to do in their spare time. The collages were not collected for analysis. The goal of the creative project was to encourage girls to call upon diverse facets of experience which could act as a springboard for discussion in the interviews.

Creative, involved tasks are reported to be effective strategies to use when working with children, particularly in combination with interview (Punch).

Finally, as a gesture of appreciation for both the teachers' and students' assistance I taught two hip-hop dance lessons during the regularly scheduled physical education classes once all data was collected.

Data Analysis

With qualitative research, the distinction between data collection and data analysis is not fixed (Patton, 2002). It is best to make data analysis an early and ongoing process (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, analysis began immediately following the first interview. I acknowledged and recorded my reflections and analytical insights in a reflexive journal throughout the rapport building as well as the data collection processes to improve the quality of data analysis (Patton).

Once interviews were completed, pseudonyms were assigned to participants in order to maintain confidentiality. Interview data were transcribed verbatim to ensure that contextualized meaning was preserved (Patton, 2002). Data were analyzed according to IPA (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Though IPA does not prescribe a rigid approach to analysis, it presents a helpful set of flexible guidelines that can be adapted as appropriate given the goals of the researcher. It is important to note that the objective of IPA analysis is not to report the frequency of a specific 'type' of response but to interpret the meanings of those responses. For the analysis of this study, I followed the general analytic stages set out by Smith and Osborn (2003). In order to capture and understand the meaning of the data, I engaged in an interpretive relationship with the transcripts by reading them once through carefully and revisiting them often throughout

analysis. While reading the transcripts, I made notes of interesting points and my reflections in the left-hand margin. Emerging theme titles were written in the other margin. Smith and Osborn (2003) make it clear that "some parts of the interview will be richer than others and so warrant more commentary" (p. 67). This was indeed the case and some sections of the interviews were the focus of more intense engagement and interpretation than others.

After all of my themes had been identified, they were refined and condensed where possible and I looked for connections or overlaps between them. This was the most creative, challenging, and analytical part of the process for me as it required a continual back and forth between the data and my interpretations to ensure that it was indeed the participant's voices coming through in the themes. This process involved using flow diagrams and charts to visualize how the girls' stories fit together and to "capture the essential quality of what was found in the text" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 68). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that diagrams can help to conceptualize and explain the data as opposed to simply describing it. Indeed these diagrams, although rough, enabled me to see thematic relationships in a way text did not. In time, an essential picture of the girls' experiences began to emerge and I embarked on the final stage, creating a narrative account of the participants' accounts and my own interpretation.

Sandelowski (1993) advocates that theoretical and conceptual frameworks play an important role in the analysis, interpretation, and organization of qualitative studies. While an ecological model of physical activity (Spence & Lee, 2003) provided a theoretical lens for this study, an inductive approach was taken to analysis in order to allow the themes to emerge without being subject to preconceived categories (Patton,

2002). Member checking interviews allowed me to delve further into the emergent themes and obtain the rich data that was the goal of this study.

Quality of Research

The issue of quality control in qualitative research has been addressed by many scholars who concern themselves with qualitative inquiry (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yardley, 2000). While there is consensus that qualitative research necessitates judgment by criteria distinct from those applied to quantitative inquiry, there are no universal guidelines set forth. This is in keeping with the philosophy of many qualitative methods (Patton; Yardley). Recently, scholars have argued that qualitative researchers should claim responsibility for rigour in their work by employing verification strategies and by self-correcting throughout the research process (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). This practice moves the responsibility of maintaining rigour from the readers' judgments of the final product to the investigator's actions throughout the study and promotes use of strategies intuitive and appropriate to the particular study in question.

To help ensure rigour in my study, I engaged in several verification strategies continuously throughout the data collection and analyses processes and sought to be as responsive as possible to the data (Morse et al., 2002). Responsiveness involved being sensitive and flexible to issues of saturation, sampling, formulating questions for member-checking interviews, and to the emergence of categories and themes. Verification strategies included ensuring methodological coherence. That is, I carefully considered the fit between the research question, the sample, study design and methods, and analysis procedures. Additionally, I collected and analyzed data concurrently as

recommended by Morse et al. Member checking interviews were conducted as part of the research inquiry (during analysis) as opposed to being used as verification of overall results at the end of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Further guidance for ensuring quality in qualitative research was provided by Yardley (2002) who suggests criteria that can be used to both enhance and evaluate the validity of qualitative inquiry. These characteristics are not prescribed but instead provide an approach that can be adapted to the chosen methodology.

Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context refers to the appropriate use of theory and inclusion of relevant literature and empirical data in the formulation of the research question as well as interpretation. Indeed, this study emerged from my careful consideration and contemplation of existing knowledge generated through both qualitative and quantitative inquiry. Sensitivity to context also refers to awareness of the socio-cultural setting of the study. I sought to achieve this by spending considerable time in the participants' daily lives at school both in and out of the classroom. Additionally, being a female with my own complex relationship with physical activity and taking careful steps to be reflexive in the way I attended to the girls' stories by keeping a journal enhanced my sensitivity to context. Yardley also indicates that language and behaviours may influence the balance of power in the research process and should be considered. Therefore, it was a conscious decision to ask the girls to address me by my first name in all of my interactions with them. Furthermore, I framed the interview setting in such a way that attempted to put the girls in the 'expert' position by using phrases such as "It's been a long time since I was your age and I'm wondering if you can help me to remember what it's like…."

Commitment, Rigour, Transparency and Coherence

Commitment was demonstrated through prolonged engagement with the topic, not only as a researcher but as someone who has contemplated my relationship with physical activity and my body throughout most of my life. In addition, I illustrated commitment to enhancing knowledge of the method and best practices for interviewing children through careful and abundant reading and asking questions of other researchers with expertise in both phenomenology and working with children. Rigour depends partly on the adequacy of the sample (Yardley, 2002). By the end of the member checking interviews, saturation of data had been achieved. Interpretation was also rigorous in that I engaged in "prolonged contemplative and empathetic exploration of the topic" (Yardley, p. 222).

Transparency and coherence refer to the clarity and persuasiveness of the process, description, and interpretation. I sought to achieve transparency by detailing each step of the data collection process and by providing adequate pieces of the girls' stories to illustrate and reinforce the interpretation of data. In order to be transparent I also had to carefully explore my own experiences in relation to the research topic. Given that it is largely derived from the hermeneutical phenomenological tradition, IPA analysis does not support Husserl's concept of epoché (identifying, bracketing and removing one's own beliefs from the analysis) (Laverty, 2003). Instead, the researcher is closely involved with the data and the interpretation process. However, a reflexive journal was helpful for assisting with methodological decisions as well as deepening my own interpretations and awareness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I started an informal reflexive journal when the idea of this study was first taking shape. By writing in the reflexive journal after each day with

the participants and other appropriate times, I believe I deepened my involvement with the data and the overarching subject matter.

Finally, the credibility of qualitative research depends highly on the skills and abilities the researcher brings to the study, as he/she is the instrument of measurement (Patton, 2002). I believe I brought competence and sensitivity to this study as I have worked and developed rapport with this age group of girls in the capacity of a dance teacher for several years and through a year-long practicum placement at a residential home for young women during my undergraduate degree. I also have professional experience conducting interviews with diverse populations through previous employment as a communications specialist at a Canadian university. In addition, I completed a graduate level course in qualitative methodologies in which my interview skills were developed. Although not an expert in the intricate philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, I have engaged in extensive reading regarding phenomenological methodologies as well as interview techniques for children.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The data from this study revealed that physical activity was intricately woven into the fabric of participants' daily lives. All of the girls were fairly active both at school and in their free time and activity seemed to be a very 'natural' part of their day. For these girls the necessary pieces of the puzzle, or most of them, were in place; they had the time, access to appropriate places and spaces, adequate parental support and good friends to engage with. While physical activity often appeared in their narratives as a source of fun, pleasure, self-esteem, and social opportunity, it also emerged less frequently as a source of anxiety, concern, and conflict.

At times, it was difficult for girls to articulate and express their experiences of physical activity in descriptive, concrete language. This suggested to me that play, activity, and movement did not always require or call upon explicit thought, intention or effort. Instead, it often just happened as part of the natural flow of their day. However, the stories girls did tell demonstrated that they value physical activity and that it contributes to their sense of self and the ways in which they move through the world.

In listening to the girls' stories it became clear that opportunities for physical activity were initially contingent upon practical considerations such as neighbourhood features and physical environments (e.g., proximity and access to appropriate spaces), as well as the availability of appealing and enjoyable options. In turn, the presence of appealing and enjoyable options was often facilitated by key people such as parents, coaches, and teachers. If we consider that these practical elements form the foundation from which girls leap, then the quality of their experiences is influenced by the texture of their social environments, the people around them, and perceptions of their own abilities.

Thus, in essence, girls negotiate and manage their physical activity experiences within their physical and social environments.

Several themes emerged from the data which help to illuminate what lies at the heart of girls 'physical activity experiences. Together these themes capture what it is like to be 'in their shoes.' Therefore, the data will be presented along the following themes: physical activity lets girls shine; taking care of myself inside and out; it's different for girls; people are key; and places and spaces.

Physical Activity Lets Girls Shine

Physical activity contributed meaningfully to the daily lives of participants and allowed them to 'shine' in various ways. The girls' stories revealed that engagement in both structured and unstructured activities in school, sport, and free-play settings provided them with opportunities to explore their own abilities and the world around them. Therefore, the theme 'physical activity lets girls shine' will be discussed along the sub themes of developing and demonstrating skills, exploration of the world around them, and providing a creative outlet.

Developing and Demonstrating Skills

Participants derived enjoyment from developing physical skills and were curious about their unique capabilities. Sadie's account of her dance classes revealed the importance of being challenged. "At first it was kind of boring…just stretches and stuff. But then it started getting more interesting and the moves got more challenging… it felt more like dancing and I got better and better which was cool." As Sadie was presented with increasingly difficult physical tasks her enjoyment of dance increased. She also referred to feeling good about getting better at it. Indeed, physical improvement was

important to many of the girls. Kate shared her favorite part of playing soccer, "I just like to practice a lot and get better at it." Similarly, when asked about what she liked about being on the volleyball team, Lily explained, "I like it when I get to know about something and get used to it and get good at it…I had just played [volleyball] for a unit in gym, and wasn't used to it, so I was surprised I made the team. But now my serves are better." For these girls, seeing themselves get better at something contributed to their enjoyment of it. However, they also valued practicing in and of itself. As Sophie expressed, "Well, I really like practicing my skating and shooting the puck and stuff … actually I love hockey practices, sometimes more than games." Sophie's quote suggested that the tangible outcomes of activity were not always the primary focus for girls; simply engaging in the process also held meaning for them.

In addition to developing skills, girls enjoyed demonstrating and performing their talents to those around them. Sadie loved the spotlight of the stage. "My favourite part of doing dance is doing performing… I pretend that I'm a big star that everyone wants to see." Anne had similar feelings, "it just felt really good to get up on stage and dance…it was scary at first, but then I just got used to it and it was just so fun." In this statement Anne revealed how her confidence grew while she was on stage and was accompanied by a sense of exhilaration. Sport settings also provided girls with a forum to show off their skills. Sophie excitedly recounted her memory of a large track meet she had participated in, "It's so exciting at the big track meet… to just race all day in front of your friends and know that all [those] people are watching you, it's like your day to shine."

These quotes indicated that the girls were proud of their accomplishments in the physical realm. Other girls shared similar sentiments. Julia expressed how excited she

was about playing on the school floor hockey team, "I love floor hockey, because I was like goalie for the girl's team last year and I got us bronze…" When asked how she felt about playing the position of goalie she answered, "… it's kind of like an important position so I feel kind of special that I get to play it." Feeling special through a physical endeavour was also described by Anne, "…I've been teaching my sister to play badminton a bit, sometimes we just go in the backyard and have lessons…it's kind of like my thing that I'm good at." Through these experiences girls were able to occupy desirable social roles that recognized and showcased their unique skills and abilities.

Exploring New Places

Participation in physical activity also presented girls with opportunities to travel to new places and explore the world around them. Many of the girls' favorite memories of physical activity involved travel away from home and being exposed to novel situations. Sophie recalled, "My other favorite memory is um, at the Butterdome. That's in Edmonton and you race there… it was so fun, we stayed there until 9 at night racing and stuff." Kate's favorite memory was similar,

> Well we had this one tournament in Edmonton and we won all our games and got first place and then we got to go to West Edmonton Mall on our own afterwards and hang out and do what we wanted, it was fun because we never get to go there really…. that was the best part because usually we have to go with adults.

For Kate and Sophie, going to a new place brought with it new freedoms and the chance to be independent of adults. Their participation in school sports removed them from the usual structure and rules of their daily lives, fostering independence. As Sophie put it

during a member checking interview, "It's really time to get away and look at new things, so you're not just like cooped up in this little box like ____."

Nicole's favorite memory involved traveling very far from home to visit her mother,

> Um, it was when I was in _____, last Christmas… and I went horseback riding with my mom and her boyfriend and my sister…it was really special because I got to be with my mom and in a new place at the same time… I was like riding on a horse by the ocean with my favorite person…

Nicole's story painted a vivid picture of the richness of that experience for her and how place and people were intricately involved. People were also an important part of Sophie's memory, "We were in Hinton doing a tournament, and my friends were all there and we got to go swimming and stuff… It was fun because I met lots of new people…" During a member checking interview she stressed again the importance of meeting new people, "Well, it's fun to go to new places because you meet new people and get to talk to them and stuff."

Providing a Creative Outlet

Another way which physical activity allowed girls to shine was by providing them with creative outlets and a means to express themselves through their bodies. Emily referred to the link between creativity and movement in one of her stories, "um, one of my favorite memories…it was in the talent show with Anne and Kira, we did singing and dancing, well, it wasn't like dancing, dancing, but it had a lot of just, like, movement in it that we made up…" Since Emily could not take formal dance classes due to financial reasons, making up dance routines was a way for her to, "…dance anyway and pretend that I'm a real dancer." Similarly Julia's favorite after school activity was making up

dance routines, "Well, my friend Britney, me and her dress up and dance and stuff. We have a little talent show type thing. We make up our own dances and pretend we're famous." Sadie also enjoyed creating dances and added, "… I like to challenge my friends to make up dance competitions and stuff…it's really fun…"

The element of creativity emerged in activities other than dance. Emily described making up different kinds of games outside, "we go play spies outside…or we pretend we're detectives looking for the bad guys… or sometimes we just make other games up." And Nicole and her friends "…go to the park and sometimes think of adventures we can go on." These examples of creative, active play are located within girls' free time after school. However, Emily pointed out the importance of creative free play at school as well, "I like recess better than gym because it's more fun and you're allowed to do your own thing…like make up games and your own rules." Julia added, "…in one gym class we got to make up our own activity…like all the rules and everything…it was so much fun because it was our own game …"

Emily was involved in drama lessons outside of school but was unsure if it could be considered physical activity,

> I take drama too…I'm in a play soon with David from class and we have to rehearse together…I really like it because I'm a really creative person, but I don't know if it counts as physical activity…but it's why I can't do a lot of other things because I have to choose what I do…drama is just part of me

Emily's uncertainty about whether drama 'counts' as physical activity suggested that girls made distinctions between types of activities and situate themselves along that spectrum accordingly. While Emily didn't consider herself to be 'athletic', she accepted

that she had talents that resided elsewhere, in the more creative domain of drama. Dance was also considered to be creative by the girls, but fell more within the bounds of 'physical activity'. As Nicole explained, "…well I know some people don't think dance is exercise…but it's hard work and if you do it a lot you get sweaty and stuff too…I think it makes you just as in shape as soccer or baseball…"

In summary, physical activity lets girls shine by allowing them to recognize their unique skills and demonstrating them to others. Girls were also exposed to new places through their involvement in physical activity which promoted feelings of autonomy and independence. Girls enjoyed making up their own activities that were free of adult influence and evaluation and actively created situations that allowed their 'inner star' to emerge.

Taking Care of Myself, Inside and Out

Being physically active was strongly associated with being and looking healthy. Girls described how physical activity allowed them to care of themselves inside and out in terms of looking healthy, feeling good, and finding a balance.

Looking 'Healthy'

Participants had very definite and consistent ideas about benefits of physical activity and its link to body size and health. As Emily put it, "Physical activity is pretty fun… and it helps your body structure and keeps you healthy…" Making a clear connection between activity and body size, Emily continued, "…you don't gain much weight with it and you get stronger." Anne shared similar thoughts when she said, "…physical activity makes you healthy and makes sure you don't get big." Nicole agreed and added, "sports and activity are good to be healthy and look in shape."

These quotes reflected a strong belief that physical activity is something that 'makes' girls healthy. Furthermore, as girls shared more of their thoughts on the subject, a complicated relationship between health, body size and physical activity emerged. For example, many girls considered thinness to be the hallmark of health. When asked to explain what the term 'healthy' meant in a member checking interview, Anne answered, "… it's just being in shape and being skinny." Sadie agreed and said, "… healthy is just like not being fat…" If skinny was equated with health, then physical activity entered the equation as a means through which thinness could be achieved. Sophie provided a simplistic summary of this relationship, "I'm like really skinny because I do lots of physical activity…" And Nicole referred to activity as "…what makes girls stay skinny and thin."

Achieving a thin or skinny body was tied up in many of the girls' declared motivations for being active. During a member checking interview, Sadie reflected, "being in shape is like being skinny, that's why we do activity." While Kate, one of the most athletic girls in the study, explained why physical activity was so important to her, "…Well, basically I do it not to get fat." For these girls, being thin was clearly synonymous with being healthy and physical activity was perceived as a way in which a thin body could be achieved.

While being thin or skinny carried positive associations for participants, being 'big' or 'chubby' carried with it a number of negative associations. For instance, Lily said, 'Well if you're chubby or fat you're probably being lazy and not eating the right foods…" Nicole added, "…you don't want to be fat because you won't be very popular…" In these quotes girls linked being fat with social deficiencies such as being

slothful, unpopular and failing to make good food decisions. Lily's sentence in particular alluded to the notion that being overweight is a consequence of personal action or inaction. However, Julia pointed out that simply being overweight can act as a barrier to being active, "…once you get chubby , it's hard to start [being active] again… you're used to a different lifestyle and it's hard to change, and … if you get a little bit chubby, then it's hard to run and stuff, because you have to carry extra weight…

The consequences of being overweight spilled into the emotional life of girls as well. Lily reflected, "Well, if you're big you feel like, well you don't feel like happy because, I don't know…Just because you won't feel good about yourself and you won't be able to feel happy…" These thoughts reveal a salient and provocative connection between body size, happiness, and identity.

Feeling Good

While girls discussed physical activity as a way to manage the observable shape and size of their bodies, expressions of how they felt when being active were located more noticeably within their bodies. Lily described it like this, "when I'm playing and sometimes in gym, I feel sorta hyper inside and calm at the same time..." While Kate explained, "I just feel like I always want to go running and I would go crazy if I couldn't…." When asked to explore this feeling more Kate reflected, "Well, it's like hard to describe, but it's just sort of this thing inside me…"

Both Lily and Kate referred to an inner sensation that was difficult for them to articulate. This difficulty was shared by many of the girls. For example, Emily attempted to express her experiences of running,

> I'm not a fast runner, but I like the way it feels so sometimes I just wish I could run with my eyes closed, like just run and run with no one watching me… it's just like how my body feels, I can't really explain it, but my legs and arms kinda feel light or, um, tingly or something…

Although she struggled to find words, Emily alluded to a kinesthetic sensation. Her story also revealed her desire to 'just run' without a specific destination or goal and regardless of how fast she was. I interpreted this as her enjoyment of running for its own sake, not necessarily for its outcomes. Along a similar line, Lily described the joy she took in the mere act of dancing, "…dance is good because, well, I just like to move and stuff, and you can't like do it wrong…I always want to move and dance… even in my room by myself I dance."

Being active provided girls with a way to nurture themselves and contributed to a sense of inner contentment. Sophie stated, "Well…like I like being active, it makes me happy inside and it makes me feel like I'm doing everything correctly." Julia described how doing yoga was her strategy for dealing with a stressful day, "Well, if I come home and feel stressed after school, I like to do yoga with my Mom or just in my room, it makes me feel like calmed down inside or something." Kate added, "…if I've had a bad day, I always go for a run and when I'm done it seems better."

Finding a Balance

Although participants described various ways in which physical activity contributed to their physical and emotional wellbeing, they also indicated a need to balance it with other activities. As Sadie explained, "I'm a really like active person and I like to move a lot. But I also just like to sit down and rest." While Emily admitted, "Well,

it depends on the day, like if you just don't feel like it, then us girls would probably just sit down and watch a movie." For Julia, a variety of activities was important, "…sometimes I play with my friends for a little while and then I um, do homework and I have a little relaxing time and just lay in my bed and read sometimes. Sophie even referred to the perils of too much physical activity and remarked, "… if you're too skinny, then too much activity can do you wrong. How do you know how much is enough?... it's just when you're feeling good."

Being too busy was a challenge several of the girls had to negotiate and sometimes it meant choosing between extracurricular activities. Kate gave up dance because she, "used to dance and play soccer but I don't this year because I just had too much going on for sports and stuff…" Whereas Anne had to negotiate the extent of her involvement with dance,

> Well I'm thinking that once I learn Irish dance a bit better I'll go into jazz and ballet again and do all three. But that's a lot of work to do for the show and everything cuz the dances are 3 to 5 minutes long and I'll have to know all three so I don't know what I'm going to do yet. I might be too busy with dance 3 times and swimming lessons.

Having too many extracurricular commitments sometimes cut into their other activities. For instance, Lily shared her frustrations, "…if you kind of have to go to that sport or lesson or something, and you have other plans or want to do something else, it kind of ruins those plans." Kate also referred to feeling like she was missing out on other activities when she said, "...sometimes on Wednesday when I swim, my friends go skating, and I never really get to go."

In summary, girls viewed physical activity as an important part of taking care of themselves, both inside and out. They clearly equated being thin with being healthy and being overweight with a variety of negative feelings and consequences. Interestingly, they spoke of physical activity as a means to an end (i.e., that is to attain a thin, healthy body), but their experiences of physical activity seemed to be more holistic and process focused, not outcome focused.

Thus, there emerged a sense that these girls were describing both the kinesthetic and emotional experiences of *being* active and of wanting to satisfy social ideals of health, fitness, and thinness *through* activity.

It's Different for Girls

In addition to picking up on social perceptions of what a healthy female body looks like, girls were sensitive to distinct social expectations regarding their physical activity behaviours. This section explores how 'it's different for girls' in terms of expectations and opportunities, how boys fit in, and negotiating gender.

Expectations and Opportunities

Participants had strong beliefs about what kinds of activities were considered appropriate for girls and boys. Many of them did not believe that physical activity was a common priority for girls. Sophie, who considered herself slightly different because she was "so active and sporty" remarked, "Um, some girls my age… they're not like me, they don't really like sports, they like to go shopping all the time and stuff…I don't really like to go shopping. I just don't care about that stuff." Lily added, "… well, activity, it's kind of different for girls…like we have lots of things on our mind and stuff, so we're not

into it…it's sometimes not as important." When asked why physical activity might not be as important for girls, Lily explained,

> Well, now it's ok, but when you're older, it depends …you might be in school still and you may have not time to do it, it might take more time away from homework...But when you're adults you have to look after babies…and also go grocery shopping and go to work.

Nicole shared a similar sentiment, "… now it's ok but soon we'll have to work and stuff…and when we're an adult we'll have kids and have to drive them everywhere, like my mom.

The stories shared by participants are richly indicative of girls' perceptions of adulthood, femininity and domesticity. It appears that girls believe a specific set of domestic responsibilities awaits them in adulthood and that physical activity does not fit into women's daily lives as it is pushed out and replaced by duties such as childrearing, preparing meals and earning an income.

Girls also felt that their physical abilities were perceived to be inferior to boys' abilities. For instance, Sophie remarked, "Well, if you're playing on a boys team, they usually don't let you play, they think they can get the best of you just cuz you're a girl. They think you're not as good." Likewise, Kate relayed her frustrations with physical education class, "I feel like if there's a guy gym teacher, they, um, always like the guys better because they're more active… They think that girls are less active just because they're girls and that guys are better athletes." Kate continued to point out that these perceptions translated into limited opportunities. "… boys are just more competitive and they're always kinda the teacher's pet. They always get to like set up and do everything

and they always get to be one who demonstrates it." Sophie also provided a cogent account of how perceptions of gender and competency are linked to opportunities,

> When I played on the boys team we got to body check, but only when I played on the boys team… now [on a girls team] they think we're going to get hurt but I know that everyone on our team is really strong. …when I was on the boys team it was like you're getting the privilege to check and the privilege to be not only a girl but …the same privileges as a boy …

For Sophie, being on the boys team afforded her greater opportunities and 'privileges' that were not available to her as a girl. Her reflection indicates how clearly aware she is that boys and girls are perceived, and thus treated differently.

How Boys Fit In

As some of the previous quotes indicate, boys appeared frequently in girls' stories of physical activity. Girls often talked about boys as playmates at school and described positive and negative interactions. Emily's story revealed camaraderie between girls and boys, "In the winter we would build snow forts by the bike rack at school, and the boys built theirs by the bushes…we would each protect our own but sometimes we'd work together…it was fun." She continued, "I also like football at recess because we get to run around and tackle the boys. They think we're weak …so then we tackle them and try to put ponytails in their hair… but they're nice to us… they pass to us and include us…"

Emily's second quote revealed intricate dynamics between the girls and boys. She described commonsense beliefs about girls being weaker than boys, but also indicated that girls and boys were able to play well together well and that boys made girls feel included. In contrast, Lily didn't like playing with boys and echoed the commonsense

beliefs Emily alluded to, "Most of the time the boys always play hard and push each other and stuff …and girls are gentle and soft and kind of like care about mistakes…but boys are aggressive."

Although the girls enjoyed playing with boys at times, they were also very sensitive to the gaze of boys. In a member checking interview, Sadie explained, "Well, sometimes you know, boys, they always make fun of people and stuff, so girls might just …feel they can't do it and their self-esteem has been shrunk if they get made fun of or something." To complicate matters, some girls had developed crushes on the boys. Emily confided, "Well, football started because I have a crush on somebody right now…" And Sadie said she, "…liked a guy for a while, but not anymore." Capturing the attention and affection of boys became a source of anxiety for some and was believed to be closely related to, even dependent on, appearance and body size. Discussion under the theme, 'taking care of myself, inside and out' indicated that girls were sensitive to issues of body size as they related to physical activity and health. Body size is also tied up in their perceptions of what it is to be attractive or desirable, specifically in the eyes of boys. Julia shared this poignant reflection,

> …if you go through a break up and then you meet this guy that you like but he's mean to you or whatever…well at first you want to be pretty and skinny and stuff for him, but then if he's mean to you, you think what's the point of being skinny if no one is going to love me for it...

Julia's story described how girls sometimes orient themselves towards boys' gaze and evaluate themselves through it. Sophie offered further reflections on the importance girls place on being skinny in order to attract the opposite sex in a member checking interview,

> Well, maybe they want to look good and stuff, for a guy… they want to feel like they're all that and look nice…. They want to seem average at least….and some want to be more than average so then they want to look really nice and they want to look very skinny.

In both Sophie's and Julia's quotes thinness is equated with desirability. Furthermore, Sophie's last sentence revealed that thinness is believed to give girls status over others and is necessary to be noticed by boys.

Negotiating Gender

While girls were clearly aware of social norms relating to feminine and masculine behaviour and expectations regarding physical activity and appearance, they were not simply passive recipients of these messages. Girls often engaged in subtle negotiations that attempted to accommodate and assimilate their own beliefs and desires into their experiences. Kate illustrated how she was reluctant to accept her gym teacher's beliefs about girls' and boys' abilities. At first she said, "Teachers just think that girls don't do a lot of sports." When asked why teachers might think that she answered, "I don't know, well, because they just think guys are a lot more stronger and if they're stronger they can like run faster or do more things…but I don't believe that at all….it makes me want to prove them…that we're better or just as strong." Nicole agreed and added, "…it seems like teachers always think boys are better at gym and …all sports…but, I know that's not true, I'm way better then some…" Sadie also described how she negotiated social pressures related to gender. "I remember my self-esteem used to go low because people would pick on me because I was a girl that was actually playing hockey. As I grew older though, to like maybe 10 or 11, I started to think that I could actually like play." I then

asked her what made her come to that realization and she replied, "I just tried and showed myself."

Sadie's story illustrated how she was able, over time, to reject and look beyond the social messages she was picking up on and trust her own feelings about what she wanted to do and what she was capable of. Sophie also advocated for trusting oneself instead of being swayed by others. As she put it, "you just have to be true to yourself and follow your heart… I know best, no one else can tell me if I'm good or bad at something." Sophie also drew upon role models to help her cope with social expectations and reflected,

> At first I thought hockey, it's a boy's thing, girls can't do it. But then I looked at those girls like in the NHL hockey league, you know, in the girls NHL… and I saw them on TV and thought they've worked hard, they've made a difference, maybe I can make a difference too.

In these subtle ways, girls were able to reframe or even reject perceived social norms around boys' and girls' activities and competencies and demonstrated that they were not simply passive receptacles of external messages. While they were keenly aware of what the social norms were, they engaged in inner self talk and drew upon external sources inspiration to accommodate their own interests.

In summary, the girls in this study articulated a distinct awareness of being 'a girl' and of the perceived disadvantages that come along with this. Many expressed a belief that their teachers, coaches and male counterparts perceive girls to be less competent at sports and games and less physically strong and capable than boys. Some girls felt that this perception of inferior physical ability resulted in diminished opportunity to partake in

sports, assume leadership roles, and demonstrate skills in physical education. However, girls questioned some of the commonsense beliefs they encountered pertaining to physical activity and gender and found small ways to stretch and challenge their social environment so that they might move more freely and comfortably throughout it.

People are Key

The previous sections illustrate how girls' physical activity experiences are greatly shaped by their gender and explored the role that boys play. However, other people, including friends, peers, family members, and influential adults also emerged as important contributors to the texture and quality of girls' physical activity. Through their stories, girls described how people open doors for them, get in their way, and provide support and inspiration.

Opening Doors

Parents, teachers, and coaches were instrumental in providing physical activity opportunities and 'opening the doors' for girls' participation. In some instances, parents and coaches opened doors in very practical ways by registering girls in organized sports and activities and providing the necessary scheduling, financial, and transportation support. However adults also opened doors for girls in more nuanced ways such as accommodating their diverse skill sets and encouraging activities not traditionally considered feminine.

All of the girls interviewed were currently involved in at least one extra curricular activity or had been within the past year. These activities ranged from those traditionally considered feminine such as dance and gymnastics, to activities not traditionally considered feminine such as ice hockey and soccer. When girls were asked how they

came to be involved in the activity or activities, parents often were identified. For Sophie, "It was my mom's idea to play [soccer]." Lily answered "Well my mom signed me up for gymnastics when I was 6." Likewise, Anne explained, "Well, my mom was on a badminton team and stuff when she was young and my Aunty still is, so now I play too." In Kate's case, it was her father who suggested she play ice hockey "…my dad played hockey and still does and thought I should play to… so he put me in it a few years ago." Sadie's father also facilitated her entrance into hockey as she recalled, "Well, I guess it was me who really wanted to in the first place, but he um, he gave me lots of support and helped me get on the boys team because there was no girls team at that level."

The parents of these girls provided the financial support needed for participation in organized activities. However, these opportunities were often negotiated within the unique social and economic circumstances of each family. Emily referred to the economic realities her family faced when she said, "I also want to dance at Stageworks, but I'm not allowed to go in it because it's $800." She was currently involved in drama classes once a week and had to prioritize and choose between activities. Anne also illustrated the negotiations her family engaged in and explained, "I wanted to take gymnastics, but my sister and I could only choose one activity each… because if I did both, my sister wouldn't be able to do anything."

Coaches and teachers also opened doors to girls within the school setting. By accommodating girls' unique abilities within physical education and sport, teachers and coaches made it easier for some girls to be involved in extra curricular activities. Emily described how she came to be involved with the track team. "…I like track because you don't have to run fast to join and Mr. Smith is a really nice teacher which makes it easier

for us….he knows I can't run fast so lets me run a shorter distance." By accommodating Emily's abilities and recognizing effort as well as sheer skill and competence, the physical education teacher opened a door for her. If her participation was contingent on a singular, arbitrary skill standard, this door may have been closed. Similarly, Julia shared her experience as playing goalie for the floor hockey team and the coach's influence on her decision to try out again. Julia described herself, as "not like super athletic or anything" but was excited to be invited to try out again for the team. "I played goal last year and got us bronze…Mr. Brown told me I could probably be goalie again if I try out." The coach's positive encouragement seemed to prompt her decision to try out again.

Support and Inspiration

Peers and team members were mentioned repeatedly in the girls' stories and contributed significantly to their enjoyment of activities and sports. Given that 'it's fun' was the most common answer girls provided when asked what they liked best about physical activity, factors contributing to their enjoyment were essential. As an example, playing on the volleyball team was a new experience for Lily and she was not overly confident in her abilities. However, she explained how the support of her teammates helped her out, "Um, well, people on the team really like cheer, um cheer for me and stuff. And it like makes you build up confidence… in one volleyball game I couldn't get any serves over, and then when my friends were cheering me on I got it over 5 times." For Emily, simply having a friend to do things with inspired her to try new activities, "Well, I didn't used to play [badminton], but now it's me and Anne who get a drive in the morning and it's fun… it doesn't matter what you're doing sometimes it's just if you have friends there..."

Family members such as parents and grandparents also provided inspiration to girls. Sadie reflected, "My mom inspires me a lot, she's always encouraging me and helping me get to my stuff, she's so nice," Nicole talked about her mom as well, "When my mom is here, that's one of the things we do together is be active…We would always go for walks or jogging and it was our time…" Grandparents were a great source of inspiration for Sophie. She shared a touching memory of being inspired by her grandmother,

> …we went on vacation once and there is a rock climbing wall and my grandma said I should go on it so I tried…I couldn't get to the top on the easy one so I thought I couldn't do the hard one. So… I gave up on it. Then my grandma said why don't you try it one more time Sophie… and I said yeah ok, and I tried and I got to the top of the hard wall.

Sophie also described how thinking of her grandparents and engaging in an inner dialogue inspired her in her hockey games,

> My grandparents, they support me. I know even when they're busy… I know that they're always like at home thinking about me and stuff. So I can think about them and I think that if they were here they would have liked me to get goals for them and they would have been really proud of me and happy.

Through these examples it's clear that by providing encouragement at the right time, people helped girls overcome obstacles and inspired them to persevere.

In summary, people contribute the texture and quality of girls' physical activity experiences by helping to facilitate opportunities that suit girls' needs and interests and by providing verbal encouragement and support. However, people can also present

barriers to girls' PA participation by failing to provide necessary financial and transportation support and by criticizing or unfairly evaluating their abilities.

Getting in the Way

In the same way that people facilitated physical activity experiences for girls, they also stood in the way at times. Nicole described her stepmother as the primary barrier to engaging in the physical activity of her choice,

> I used to do a lot of horseback riding, like take lessons, but that was when my Mum lived here but now I'm not allowed to, because I can't get a drive out there because my step mom won't…And it wouldn't be fair to my stepsisters or my brothers, so I'm not allowed to...My mom even offered to pay for lessons, but she still won't drive me.

Peers were also described as 'getting in the way' of girls' ability to enjoy some activities. Girls were keenly aware that their actions in physical activity settings were being watched and evaluated by their peers and were concerned about other's reactions. Sophie alluded to this feeling when she said, " I don't like it when other people watch and make fun of you cuz you can't do as well as they can…It hurts and doesn't feel very fun and the teachers don't really rely on you because you can't do as well as other kids." Sadie also described being disrupted by the behaviour of others, "There was this one girl in my dance class, she was really mean. She would just always brag about herself about how good a dancer she was and how perfect she was and it was so annoying. It was awful cuz it made me compare to her…but then she quit so I was happy." For Emily, playing with the 'wrong' people ruined her gym class, "…it depends on who you play with with, because the grade 7's were really mean to us last year, they were super mean and you had

to play against them .... they then would just hog the whole birdie the whole time." This story demonstrates how in structured settings, such as physical education class, girls were not always able to choose their playmates as they in free play settings. But, as Emily suggested, having some choice over who they play with was desirable, "It will be nice when we get to junior high and there will be different levels of gym we can choose... the really good people will go in one level and the others will be on the bottom, but all together."

Spaces and Places

The sites and settings of physical activity appeared consistently throughout participants' narratives and provided context to many of their stories and memories. Girls often discussed the physical environments around them in a practical capacity, that is, places and spaces were presented merely as one of the essential facts or details of their story. Thus, there was not always a lot of quality to these descriptions. However, the proximity and access as well as the existence of interesting destinations were important factors influencing where girls engaged in physical activity and therefore warrant attention.

Proximity and Access

As mentioned previously, girls in this study lived in a small suburban town on the outskirts of Edmonton. Seven of the eight girls were able to walk to school, often within 10 minutes. Many of them also lived close to parks, green spaces and walking trails which were referred to frequently in their stories. For many, these spaces were the site of after school and weekend activities. Emily described what she does on a typical day after school,

… we go to rainbow park and stuff, it's a brand new park they built, it used to be old and just have two slides and a seesaw, but now they built it really big….it's like a 5-minute walk from my house. Lily's answer was similar, "...after school I mostly like to go out with my friend and walk around and run in the baseball field and stuff, there's a park with benches and fields nearby and a forest."

Both Lily and Emily described their play sites in fairly vivid detail, mentioning the presence and quality of physical structures such as slides, seesaws and benches as well as the proximity to their home. For both girls access to these spaces was very easy. Julia alluded to ways in which the close proximity of her school and a park accommodated a range of activities. "Well, I always walk to school, and I like to play at the park and stuff and run around for a while. I like bringing my dog there after school because it's all grass back there and she can run around." Julia's quote revealed how her neighbourhood facilitated active transport to and from school, as well as other forms of activity such as free play and walking her dog.

Not all girls had such convenient access. Anne had just moved to a new neighbourhood and was therefore unable to walk to school. She lamented, "Well, I used to walk and I wish I could still but we just moved...now it's too far." Anne's after school activities were also limited by her family's recent move. "…I just moved outside of town…. and right now there's not a park, it's all pretty much all dirt and stuff, cuz it's in a subdivision." Sadie faced similar circumstances as her family had recently moved as well. While she was still able to walk to school, she described how moving affected other physical activity opportunities. "… we just moved, so I still don't know all the parks.

And I had to stop playing hockey and taking dance…it was kind of a shuffle. But as soon as I can I'm going to start again."

Sites and Destinations

In addition to underlining the importance proximity and access to spaces and places, girls' stories revealed how the characteristics of the actual sites influenced their activities. Sites of play ranged from their own backyard to forests, parks and schoolyards. For Emily, her family's backyard was a convenient place to play after school. "I do lots of stuff at home, I even play badminton at home too… we have a really small backyard, so it's an easy thing to do…" In this example Emily illustrated how she made use of a small space in a way that was fun for her.

Similarly, Lily explained how she and her friends made use of a nearby field. "…well, in the um, winter, the snow gets on the hills and the fields, so we can build snow forts because it's a good place to do that… like in between the hills. We also like to go sledding and stuff…" Being close to a hilly field meant that Lily and her friends could spend the day playing without getting bored. When they grew tired of building snow forts, they were easily able to change activities and go sledding on the same site.

Three of the girls mentioned a nearby forest that they sometimes played in. The forest was one of Lily's favorite places to play. She shared one of her best memories of being active,

> …well, me and my friend drank an energy drink one day and we were kind of hyper, so we went into the forest… we were by ourselves and we got to pretend it was like our own enchanted forest …it was really fun…if the forest wasn't there it would be kind of boring.

In this example the forest provided a space for the girls to be active in as well as contributed to their creative play.

Interesting destination points were also identified by some girls as being important in their decisions to be active. For example, Sadie said she liked to walk a lot and when asked where she replied, "..well, sometimes I walk to the park or the 7-11…I don't just walk around the streets." Kate also mentioned the 7-11 as a frequent walking destination, "… sometimes we go to the park or it depends, sometimes we'll just go around the neighbourhood or else sometimes we walk to the 7-11… There's usually lots going on there." For Kate, the 7-11 was a social meeting place for her and her friends. Although the 7-11 itself was not a site of physical activity, it provided an appealing destination and a social opportunity that resulted in her walking there frequently.

In summary, the physical environment in which girls live both facilitates and influences girls' physical activity experiences. By living in close proximity to school and to one or several of the parks, fields and forest mentioned, girls were easily able to walk to school and access interesting places to play after school and on weekends.

These girls' voices revealed the intricate ways which physical activity is woven into their everyday lives. The picture that is painted by their stories indicates that girls' social and physical environments intersect and intertwine like delicate threads to create a detailed fabric that moves around them with varying degrees of ease. If anything is clear from the girls' stories, it is that their experiences are often marked by contradictions and tensions. For example, dichotomies existed between masculine and female expectations and opportunities; being fat or thin implied moral badness or goodness; physical activity was a tool to contain the body, yet the kinesthetic experience offered a sense of release;

important people made physical activity fun, yet it was people who conveyed social messages that stifle girls' confidence; girls were sensitive to the evaluative gaze of boys, but often oriented themselves towards it.

These tensions, some subtle and some not so subtle, meant that girls had to sift through layers of complex feelings and perceptions to locate the essence of their experiences. When they did, it appeared that the actual act of engaging in movement and activity brought satisfaction and delight. At the heart of that kinesthetic experienced flourished a sense of joy, even exhilaration that was located within their bodies and their selves. However, that essential feeling could be dissipated and distracted by external voices and sources of information. The inner light that shone out from these girls was often dimmed as it made its way through the filter of the social world. Yet it is important to note that girls' found ways to make small shifts within their unique situations in order to allow their light to continue to shine.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to gain a rich understanding of young adolescent girls' experiences of physical activity as described by them. Five major themes were identified as capturing and reflecting the essence of data as interpreted during collection and analysis. These themes include: physical activity lets girls shine; taking care of myself, inside and out; it's different being a girl; people are key and; spaces and places. Together the themes help to illuminate the quintessential nature of girls' physical activity and make an important contribution to the detailed understanding of what it is like to be in their shoes.

Physical Activity Lets Girls Shine

Overall, girls valued physical activity and took pleasure in participating in a wide range of activities. Many participants particularly enjoyed developing their physical skills and demonstrating them to others. This finding is not unique and suggests that physical activity is an important realm in which girls develop a sense of their abilities and of self (Coakley & White, 1992). Indeed, the girls described physical activity as an important creative outlet that enabled them to express themselves, particularly through dance and free play. Dance was described by all participants as one of their favorite activities and occurred in both structured and unstructured settings. Given this finding, it is important to consider that dance appears to be relatively understudied as a valuable form of physical activity in the research literature in this area. Flores (1995) showed that a physical education intervention based upon dance- related activities significantly increased fitness levels and interest in physical activity among African American and Hispanic girls compared to a control group that attended standard physical education classes.

However, as Flores (1995) notes, although girls appear to immensely enjoy dance it is not a central component to mainstream physical education curricula's or part of dominant discourses of physical activity. This poses a problematic circumstance: if girls enjoy dance and feel if fits with their skills and interests, yet perceive its diminished status in mainstream physical activity settings, perhaps they are left to make troubling conclusions about where their talents and interests lie on the hierarchy as well. By excluding and/or devaluing some activities (not just dance) from the options most often presented to girls, we risk further inhibiting their involvement. This finding underlines the importance of providing girls with appealing and feasible activity options that resonate with their interests.

Participants also described deriving an inherent satisfaction from simply engaging in activity that was not necessarily contingent upon a specific outcome. To me these data reflect an appreciation of movement and activity *for its own sake*. Additionally, girls' enjoyment of activity often stemmed from improving their own skills. These data can be considered in relationship to achievement goal theories which have been tested empirically in sport and physical activity settings (Duda, Fox, Biddle, & Armstrong, 1992; Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Nicholls (1984) contends that individuals have differing achievement goal orientations which influence how the individual will approach certain tasks. Task-oriented individuals focus on developing and learning new skills and demonstrating mastery at a given task: their perceptions of competence are largely self-referenced. Conversely, ego-oriented individuals focus on demonstrating ability by outperforming others, therefore their competence is externally referenced, as opposed to exerting maximum effort. Not surprisingly, intrinsic motivation is associated with task-

orientation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Consideration of this theoretical approach is relevant to my findings as the girls derived enjoyment from mastery experiences and described experiences that mirror elements of task involvement and intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2000) individuals are more likely to act for the inherent enjoyment or challenge involved in a task rather than responding to external pressures or rewards when intrinsically motivated. The girls' enjoyment of movement and activity for its own sake resonates and can be located within Deci and Ryan's description of intrinsic motivation. Therefore, it may be particularly important to engage girls in physical activity settings that foster, value, and even reward this type of orientation rather meeting predefined standards of performance.

Many of the girls' positive accounts of being active were linked to free time and unstructured play. Girls enjoyed the freedom and creativity that unstructured play afforded them and used it to actively create opportunities for themselves to engage in activities they considered 'fun' and felt in control of. This finding aligns with previous research that found children view play as 'owned' and driven by children whereas sport is more controlled and directed by adults (MacDougall, Schiller, & Darbyshire, 2004). Given children's enjoyment of free play and the fact that physical activity play is an important part of children's social, cognitive, and emotional development (Pelligrini & Smith, 1998), it makes sense that children should be provided with ample free time to engage in such play. However, a recent report investigating trends in the lives of children and youth (Sturm, 2005) suggests that free time of children has declined substantially due to increased time spent in school and structured programs and activities. This decline has

also been noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics and has sparked concern and efforts to promote children's active free play (Ginsburg, 2007).

Free play was not only enjoyable to girls in my study but it also provided them with a means to negotiate past barriers they faced around participating in other physical activities. For example, one participant could not take formal dance lessons due to family financial constraints and instead engaged in dance-related activities on her free time. Campagna et al. (2002) also noted that children find creative ways to negotiate past social, economic, and geographic constraints and suggest that engaging in free play is one strategy children employ. Together these findings underline the importance and multi-faceted role free time and unstructured activity plays in the lives of children and girls and suggest that the ways in which children spend their time might be reconsidered and negotiated between parents, children, and within the greater social context in which girls and their families live.

Taking Care of Myself, Inside and Out

The girls made intricate connections between physical activity, body size, and health. Specifically, girls made little if no distinction between 'looking' healthy and 'being' healthy. Rather, they assumed that if they *looked* thin, they *were* healthy and if they *were* healthy, they would *be* thin. Health was defined, and therefore, assessed upon very definite and narrow esthetic criteria; that is, 'thin' and 'not fat'. These findings are similar to the results of a study that examined the meanings New Zealand schoolchildren construct about health and fitness (Burrows, Wright & Jungerson-Smith, 2002). Like the girls in my study, the New Zealand children viewed physical activity as a way to attain a thin, fit body and body size was a salient indicator of fitness and health.

The clear link girls make between health, thinness and physical activity indicates on one hand the success of public health efforts that stress the importance of regular physical activity (e.g., Canadian Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth; Canada Public Health Agency, 2002). However, this pervasive message can also be viewed as problematic as it may foster a dichotomous view of what is 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' and risk reducing health and wellbeing to an observable but narrowly defined concept that overlooks the lived, holistic experience of health. Recently, public health discourses of childhood obesity, and to a lesser degree physical inactivity, have come under the critical gaze of sociology scholars of physical education and health (e.g., McDermott, 2007; Gard & Wright, 2001). While the political implications underlying these arguments are beyond the focus of this discussion, the issue of the discourses surrounding children's, and particularly girls', physical activity is relevant to my study. Now that children 'get' the message that physical activity is 'good' for them, perhaps a concerted effort needs to be made to understand how children and girls interpret these discourses, how they process them and assimilate them into their actions, behaviours, and beliefs. It may be that these discourses, particularly as they relate to children, detract children from the experience of physical activity for its own sake and contribute to the construction of physical activity as an outcome-oriented task. This point may be particularly relevant in light of the recent re-launch of the ParticipACTION campaign and its current emphasis upon and strategies for promoting health messages to children and youth (see, http://www.participaction.com/index.htm). Recent television commercial spots emphasize the health risks and negative consequences of low rates of physical activity. It

may be valuable to explore the impact and interpretation of such messages in relationship to how children and girls describe their actual experiences of being active.

For girls in my study, issues of weight and health carried over into concepts of selfhood and social identities. For example, girls associated being overweight with being lazy and being thin with social value and success. Likewise, Burrows and colleagues (2002) reported that children believed being fit made people more physically attractive and popular and linked fatness with laziness and social inferiority. These findings reflect a troubling tendency among children to judge themselves and each other by weight status. In one study, overweight adolescents reported lower levels of acceptance among peers, higher levels of victimization and fewer friends then their non-overweight counterparts (Wang, Hourshyar, & Prinstein, 2006). This suggests that children ascribe significant moral and social meaning to body size and shape. Indeed, Bordo (1993) and Featherstone (1991) note that a slim toned body has come to signify self-regulation, worth, and moral standing among women. Young girls are not exempt from these pressures which only increase throughout adolescence (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998). Interpreting my data in relation to these findings suggests that preadolescent girls experience their body as signifying not only their health status but as reflecting to a certain extent their overall value and worth. This interpretation resonates with Feingold and Mazzella's speculation that dissatisfaction with aspects of the self such as physical appearance are closely tied to one's quest for socially valued and socially determined goals including attention of the opposite sex and professional success.

Although girls evaluated their bodies against external standards and described physical activity as a way to monitor and manage their bodies, they described the actual

experiences differently. They struggled to find words but alluded to kinesthetic and emotional experiences located within their bodies. The difficulty in translating movement into text has been noted previously by scholars (e.g., Markula & Denison, 2000). Rintala (1991) suggests that the lack of available language that attends to the body's experience is an artifact of the Cartesian mind body dualism. Today, ways to conceptualize, discuss, and study the body's way of knowing for its own sake are elusive. Markula and Denison outline Langer's (1953) theory of art which advocates the idea of prelingual bodily knowledge and positions the body as the most primitive and natural way of expressing thoughts and feelings (through dance for example).

While I do not propose that such an essentialist view of the body be adopted, that is, I do not suggest that the body has access to 'true' or 'unspoiled' ways of knowing, I do think the body has its own ways of knowing and that the discourses available to us are inadequate for expressing and understanding the experiences and knowledge that the body produces for its own sake. We need to move towards a way of understanding the body that gives space to the body's way of knowing for and within itself. This issue is not limited to girls' experiences, but given the complex relationship they seem to have with their bodies, it may particularly relevant to them. If more effective and privileged ways to attend to how movement actually feels were available to us, perhaps we could deepen our understanding and experiences of physical activity and the body and the ways in which they intersect in a manner that empowers girls and women. Glimpses of this concept were evident in my study as girls were clearly active participants in their physical activity experiences, described physical activity as something that 'makes them feel

better', and alluded to positive kinesthetic experiences produced from and located within their bodies.

It merits noting that cultural context plays an important role in the ways girls perceive and experience their bodies in relationship to culturally constructed ideas around weight, self worth, and physical activity (Renzaho, 2004). A cross cultural comparison would be valuable to gain a richer understanding of how the social and cultural environments are interpreted and experienced by young girls with regards to issues around health, body size, and physical activity. A comparison of this type would also be useful to understand how different cultures conceptualize, and speak about the body, bodily knowledge, movement, and health. It may be that girls generally experience their body at least partially objectively and try to conform to a particular ideal deemed attractive by the broader cultural context in which they live, although those criteria may differ across cultures. Additionally, there may be something to be learned about the ways in which different cultures view and conceptualize the body and movement that could contribute to Western discourses and health promotion efforts.

It's Different for Girls

Girls shared the belief that their physical abilities are often perceived to be inferior to boys' abilities and that boys and girls are presented with different opportunities in physical activity settings. Participants also conveyed that they do hold yet resist commonsense beliefs about masculinity and femininity through their physical activity decisions and behaviour. These findings lend support to a study conducted by Culp (1998) that explored constraints to outdoor recreation identified by adolescent girls. In Culp's study, girls described stereotypical gender roles and differences in available

outdoor recreation opportunities as meaningful obstacles. A feminist study of girls' physical education participation also found that girls perceive fewer opportunities for participation compared to male peers (Azzarito et al.) Together these findings suggest that girls are sensitive to the messages about gender roles as they relate to physical abilities conveyed through their social environment and that these messages can serve to directly and indirectly inhibit girls' physical activity choices. However, girls in my study resisted common assumptions about being 'weaker' or 'not as good' as boys and expressed a belief that they were in fact 'just as good'. This resistance and shared belief in equal ability on the part of adolescent girls has been reported elsewhere (Azzarito et al.). Further support is provided by Gibbons and colleagues (1999) who reported that girls believe they are just as skilled as boys despite feeling the need to prove themselves to teachers and coaches. It appears then that girls subtly subvert social expectations and negotiate their gender through physical activity choices and behaviours. For example, three participants in my study played hockey either currently or earlier in their life and described being aware of breaking with convention to do so. Although aware they were acting against the norm, all three still decided to play. One participant pointed to female athlete role models as her source of inspiration. Biskup and Pfitser (1999) reported that fewer girls than boys name sports heroes as their role models and that girls are more likely to identify Hollywood actresses and pop stars as people they aspire to be like. In addition, a study by Garcia and colleagues (1998) noted that girls reported being exposed to fewer active role models after the transition to high school. However, Kane (1996) suggests that even slightly increased media coverage of female athletes and the portrayal of their strength, independence and ability has the potential to challenge, or provide an

alternative to traditional ideas of femininity and Rusk (2000) cites American soccer player Brandi Chastain as a powerful example. Considering data from my study in relation to these findings suggests that although female athletes may not be as commonly identified as role models as popular culture icons, there is potential for them to be salient and positive influences on young girls. It may be important to expose girls to active role models (either through popular culture or through interactions with important people in their lives) as they progress through adolescence so that they are provided with a range of female identities to emulate and model.

In summary, participants managed conflicting experiences and feelings about what it means to be a girl in relationship to physical activity both now and in the future. Many shared a belief that as they grow into adulthood they will step into a realm of gendered, domestic duties that takes precedence over and leaves not time for physical activities. It is difficult to say where this belief comes from but Eccles and Harold (1991) have shown that girls place less importance on sport and activity as early as grade one. This suggests that girls are picking up on strong social messages around the types of behaviours that are expected of, and rewarded in, girls and women and assimilating it into their beliefs and behaviours from an early age. However, girls are not passive receptacles to such messages and find ways in which they can stretch the fabric of their social environment so that it creates more room for them to navigate on their own terms. It is perhaps incumbent for parents, teachers, and other educators to attend closely to their own beliefs and assumptions regarding girls' physical activity and other gendered issues and to be mindful of messages they convey to girls related to these topics.

People are Key

Participants identified people around them as central figures in their physical activity experiences. Parents emerged as being particularly important for facilitating practical aspects of physical activity participation such as enrollment, providing transportation, and financial support. These findings are supported by much of the research literature on parental influence on children's physical activity (see Taylor, Baranowski, & Sallis, 1994; Trost et al., 2002; Welk et al., 2003). In fact, Welk et al. (2003) found direct facilitation of PA to be one of the most powerful mediators of children's interest and involvement. Overall, data from my study revealed parents to be fairly involved; all parents had enrolled their daughters in one form of structured activity within the last year. However one participant could no longer participate in horse riding lessons due to her step-mother's refusal to drive her. This is consistent with a study by Hoefer and colleagues (2001) who found parental transportation contributed significantly to girls' involvement in out of school sport and activity.

Parents also played a role in influencing which type of activity their daughter participated. Interestingly, two of the girls' entrance into hockey, a sport not traditionally considered feminine, was prompted by suggestions made by their fathers. Therefore it appears that both parents appear to facilitate practical elements of involvement and help to shape girls' interest and perceptions of available opportunities. Peers and friends played a slightly different role than parents and were more intricately connected to the quality of girls' experiences. For some participants, friends and teammates were the ones who prompted girls' participation in school-based teams and activities. Furthermore, all of the girls said that they enjoyed doing activities with others better than by themselves. This finding is fairly intuitive and resonates with previous research that found more

physical activity done with friends was significantly and positively related to self reported physical activity levels among girls in grades 6 and 8 (Voorhees et al., 2005). Furthermore, the lack of friends or companions to engage in activity with has been identified as a constraint to leisure time activity by adolescents (Campagna et al., 2002). Thus, having someone to be active with is an important factor in girls' decisions around engaging in activity. It should be noted however that girls in my study did not automatically consider peers to be their friends or desirable playmates. It appears that girls like to have choice over whom they play with and enjoy playing with others of similar ability and interests.

Like the influence of parents and peers, the role of other influential adults is not uncomplicated. Girls were positive about their relationship with physical education teachers when they felt valued for their own unique skills and abilities, yet often felt that teachers favoured boys and considered them more competent. Other research resonates with this finding (Gilbert, 2001; Flintoff & Scranton, 2001). Interestingly three participants in this study mentioned being active with their grandparents and identified grandparents as key sources of support. Grandparents have not been identified in the research literature as important contributors to children's physical activity participation. This could be partially explained by the fact that many children do not see their grandparents regularly due to geographic or other constraints and changing family structures. Additionally, it may be that the role of grandparents or the elderly in general is not often considered to include physical activity. However, for these girls grandparents facilitated physical activity opportunities, engaged in physical activity with girls, and provided verbal and emotional support and encouragement. Thus, grandparents could

provide a unique and valuable source of information about physical activity across the lifespan for girls as well as add another layer of support in the lives of young girls.

Places and Spaces

In general, the data from this study are consistent with recent research (e.g., Hume, Salmon, & Ball, 2005, Timperio, Salmon, Telford, & Crawford, 2004) that suggests neighbourhood design and accessibility of facilities are related to child and youth physical activity engagement. Girls in this study identified a variety of places and spaces in which they engaged in physical activity including parks, forests, neighbourhood settings and their own backyards. These data align with findings from a recent study (Hume et al., 2005) that explored children's perceptions of their home and physical environments and the association with objectively measured physical activity. Children identified green spaces, outside areas, and the school as important sites of physical activity. Parental reports (Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2006) provide further support to these findings.

All but one participant in my study reported walking to and from school on a daily basis. Furthermore, other forms of physical activity (e.g., playing on playground equipment and playing with friends) often occurred on the way to and from school. Thus, it appears that simply being able to walk to and from school facilitates spontaneous activity that contributes to girls' total daily physical activity. Indeed, active commuting to school has been found to be an important contributor to children's and girls' daily physical activity levels and overall energy expenditure (Cooper, Andersen, Wedderkopp, Page, & Froberg, 2005; Tudor-Locke, Ainsworth, Adair, & Popkin, 2003). However, the fact that most of the participants walked to school is not reflective of a trend noted by

Sturm (2005) in a review of changes in the lives of children and adolescents. Sturm reports that active transportation is currently not a major source of physical activity for youth and accounts for a very small percentage of their overall PA. It could be that the unique characteristics of the neighbourhood in which these study participants live along with the close proximity of their school makes it easier for these girls to walk safely and conveniently to school than for children living in different types of neighbourhoods. This hypothesis is supported by a recent study that found children living in high-walkability neighbourhoods depicted more active transport than children living in low-walkable neighbourhoods (Holt, Spence, Sehn, & Cutumisu, 2008). Walkability was assessed by considering street connectivity, residential density, and the extent of mixed land use. Although I did not objectively assess the walkability index of the participants neighbourhoods, their descriptions refer to a neighbourhood that tends towards the high-walkability end of the spectrum.

Data obtained from this study also revealed that the presence of destination points such as 7-11 stores facilitated walking. The 7-11 acted as a social meeting point and provided incentive for girls to walk there. In this case, engaging in physical activity was not the explicit goal or purpose of the occasion; instead walking enabled girls to engage in social opportunities. This finding is supported by a study conducted Hume and colleagues (2005) that found girls' moderate physical activity to be positively associated with neighbourhood food locations. The authors speculated that food locations likely provide a walking destination for girls. Therefore, the presence of interesting destinations that provide social opportunities or other enjoyable activities may be key in promoting

physical activity. Additionally, interesting spaces and places were largely mentioned by participants as the site of free and unstructured free play.

Interestingly, none of the girls mentioned safety issues as barriers to engaging in physical activity in their neighbourhoods. Research literature has shown parental perceptions of safety to be an important contributor to the locations of children's physical activity (Veitch et al. 2006). It could be that the small community within which this study was set fostered greater perceptions of safety than larger towns and cities. It would be interesting to know what the girls' perceptions of safety were, in relation to their parents. In addition, this study took place in a small, suburban town at a very neighbourhood oriented school. It would be valuable to conduct a similar study in an urban setting, or more specifically in an inner city setting where parks and green spaces aren't as easily accessible and safety is more of an explicit concern.

Theoretical Relevance

Consistent with social ecological models of physical activity, the data in this study suggest that girls negotiate their physical activity behaviour within their social and physical environments. Features of these environments both inhibit and promote physical activity engagement. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (2001) theory (see also Spence & Lee, 2003), girls' physical activity behaviour and experiences are highly sensitive to context and vary according to specific ecological settings and developmental circumstances.

These data also resonate with the YPAP model (Welk, 1999) that suggests children's physical activity behaviour is greatly determined by two central constructs under the umbrella term predisposing factors and the interaction between them: 'Am I

able?' and 'Is it worth it?'. Data from my study revealed that for young adolescent girls, the question 'Am I able' is largely contingent upon practical factors such as having access to adequate spaces and places to engage in physical activity, time and economic resources, suitable playmates, and parents who facilitate enrollment and transportation to activities. Once engaged, the question I would argue then becomes, not 'Is it worth it?' but 'What is it like for me?'. This is a more encompassing way to consider the quality of the girls' experience, the degree of autonomy they have within it, and how well it matches their needs and interests. Furthermore, using my data as a reference, it appears that the two questions do not present themselves simultaneously; 'Am I able?' criteria must first be met and the opportunity for activity must be present before the quality can be assessed. The degree to which each construct is relevant will depend on the specific context of each situation. However, results from this study substantiate other elements of the YPAP, primarily the important role of the anchoring demographic variables of gender, social economic status, and cultural context.

Implications

The results of this study have several practical implications and may provide valuable information to parents, coaches, and educators in their efforts to encourage young girls to be active. Additionally, these results could inform future health prevention and intervention strategies targeted to children. Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from these data is the idea that girls are extremely aware of the relationship between physical activity and health and are very cognizant that physical activity is something that is 'good for them' and that they should participate in often. However the relationship between physical activity and health is intricately connected to body size,

gender roles, and identity for these girls in ways that are not necessarily constructive or empowering. More needs to be done to understand this relationship and the contribution of dominant health discourses to girls' experiences and perceptions of physical activity and health and of options available to them.

The population-health perspective maintains that health education is necessary in order for health benefits to accrue (Glanz et al. 2002). I would argue that the singular health education message of the importance of physical activity has been clearly received by this population. However, it also appears that the lived experience of health and movement for its own sake is missing from dominant health discourses and that they overlook the inherently joyful or otherwise beneficial elements of physical activity as it relates to the lives of children. Listening to children's voices and incorporating their knowledge and understandings about physical activity and health into health education efforts is an important next step.

Data also indicate that while girls know they 'should' be more active, they often find themselves in social and physical environments that are not necessarily conducive to activity in a way that fits with their lives and interests or in a way that is meaningful to them. As a result, they are left to construct their experiences within the options available to them. The fact that girls appear to be sensitive to their physical and social environments is important as the basic social cognitive literature suggests that environments should have at least four critical elements: connection, autonomy, skill-building and healthy norms (CASH) (Dzewaltowski *et al.*, 2002♦). Perhaps more needs to be done to ensure that girls' social environments are fostering these elements.

Additionally, given earlier observations that girls' physical and emotional experiences of being active are often disconnected from their experiences of striving to meet and act in accordance with greater societal expectations around health and appearance, there appears to be a gap in the way we conceptualize and discuss physical activity in the lives of girls and even of children. Perhaps discourses that resonate more deeply and effectively with the girls' lived experiences of activity are needed. Finally, the role of active free play is extremely important and perhaps not understood as fully as it needs to be in the lives of girls and children. Given the busyness of children's lives, perhaps the value of free, unstructured play needs to be emphasized more to parents and teachers.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The small sample size of this study limits the generalizability of the findings. However, it was not the goal of this study to capture and reflect the experience of physical activity for all girls. Rather the goal of an IPA study is to gain rich, detailed information of the experiences from a small number of people (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Despite the small sample size, abundant and nuanced information was gathered about the daily physical activity experiences of young adolescent girls that provides insight to the body of empirical literature on this topic as well as affords young girls with a voice. In addition, the prolonged engagement I participated in with the girls and the multiple interviews conducted provide a layer of depth not present in most studies.

Another criticism of this study could be the fact that it was conducted in a school setting. Although the purpose of the study was to gain access to girls' accounts of broadly defined physical activity, it could be that the very fact girls were in the school

environment during interviews led them to primarily consider and contemplate school-related physical activity experiences. Thus, a concerted effort was made to attend to language in order to evoke stories and memories of physical activity in all facets of their life.

Working with children presents a host of challenges and limitations (Docherty & Sandelowski, 2001; Ellis, 1998). I was extremely aware of this and took extensive steps to build rapport with the girls. However, it is likely that social desirability issues clouded some of their responses and stories. Finally, as a beginner researcher, my interviewing, analysis and interpretation abilities are not likely to be as refined or as thorough as researchers who have engaged in extensive work of this type. However, as a woman with my own diverse and contradictory physical activity experiences providing a frame of reference, along with my diligence in taking careful steps to practice disciplined empathetic neutrality and reflexiveness, I believe my position afforded some advantages.

Future Directions

This study is a small step in understanding the diverse physical activity experiences of young adolescent girls. A similar study(ies) conducted with girls of different economic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, and within different geographic settings would be valuable for deepening our understanding of this issue. Given that access to opportunity and proximity to spaces and places were important contributors to physical activity participation in this study, it is necessary to speak to girls who face different circumstances, particularly those who may not have the economic and material resources that the girls in my study had. Additionally, cultural context appears to play an

important role in girls' experiences and further research that explores how cultural and social environments interact with physical environments is needed.

Additionally, it would be useful to know where and through what mediums girls obtain their information about health and to look carefully at these discourses in order to understand how girls interpret and make sense of them. Girls expressed distinct ideas about, and made complex connections between health, gender, body size, and physical activity. In order to effectively reach this population it is important to know where they get their current information and how that information shapes their beliefs and attitudes and informs their experiences. A large scale media campaign aimed at increasing physical activity among 'tweens' was found to increase awareness and understanding of physical activity and health messages and young people who understood the messages were more likely to engage in physical activity (Bauman et al., 2008). However, my results suggest that the relationship between physical activity, health, and body size is very complex for young girls. More nuanced understanding of this relationship would be valuable for future interventions and promotion efforts. Finally, although it is important to talk to children, since parents are considered the gatekeepers of children's activity, it would be useful to talk to parents about the time use of their children and explore their perceptions of children's use of structured and free time and of their role in their children's activity decisions.

Summary

My results suggest that girls' physical experiences are complex and at times contradictory. Girls described both positive and negative experiences associated with physical activity and discussed ways in which being active made them feel good both

physically and emotionally, and other times when being active was accompanied by, or presented situations in which they experienced negative thoughts and feelings. The meanings girls ascribe to physical activity are also complicated. On many levels, physical activity holds positive meanings for girls and is a way in which they explore their own identities, forge social connections, and derive satisfaction from. However, physical activity also appears to be a site in which intricate and sometimes troubling messages around what it means to be a girl, cultural ideals of desirable body shape and size, and what it means to be and look healthy are played out. The messages and norms girls observed in their social environment often inhibited their participation or their enjoyment of physical activity and there was a strong sense that the opportunities available to girls remain dissonant from some of their needs, desires, and unique skills.

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Appendix I

Parent Information Letter

Information Letter

Title: In Their Shoes: Understanding the Physical Activity Experiences of Young Adolescent Girls

Investigators: Marianne Clark, B.ASc. (Hons)
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
(780) 492-2004; mclark1@ualberta.ca

Dr. John C. Spence, PhD
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
(780) 492-1379; jc.spence@ualberta.ca

Dear Parent,

My name is Marianne Clark. As part of my Master's degree at the University of Alberta, I am interested in learning about girl's experiences of physical activity. Specifically, I'd like to hear their thoughts and feelings about taking part in organized sports, physical education class, dance classes and free-play. The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding of what these experiences are like for girls, in their own words.

For my research, I hope to interview your child and ask them to describe their experiences of physical activity. I'd like to hear what they like or do not like about it. Before interviews begin, I will go to several of your child's physical education classes. When the teacher introduces me, I will explain my study. I will also teach 2 or 3 dance classes for the students. I have many years of dance training and taught professionally at a studio in Guelph, Ontario for several years. Participating in their class will help me get to know the children. I also hope it will help them get to know me.

Interviews will take place at the school. I will ask questions about your child's general interpretation of the term 'physical activity'. I will then ask them to share some of their experiences. This could be about their favorite or least favorite memories, times that they enjoy being active and other questions like this. You may request a copy of the interview guide at any time. Your child will not have to answer all of the questions if she does not feel comfortable. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be taped and typed up. Your child's name will be removed from the file once the interview is typed. A second interview may be requested. This will also last for 30 minutes. This means the total time commitment for your child is approximately 60 minutes. Participating in this study is not a requirement. There will be no negative consequences for your child if she does not participate. It will not affect her grades, inclusion or exclusion from class.

The information from this study may help to create better physical activity opportunities for girls that match their needs and wishes. By listening to the girl's perspectives, more

effective programs and interventions can be designed and delivered by teachers, educators, coaches, and even parents.

Risks: There are no expected risks associated with this study. However, there is the possibility that your child may feel uncomfortable talking about some of these topics. To reduce this risk, your child can choose to not answer any of the interview questions. She may also request to have the tape recorder turned off at any time. You or your child may also ask for a copy of the interview record at any time. I will remove any information that you or your child does not wish to be included.

Confidentiality:
To protect your child's identity she will be given a false name. All written records and audiotapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Alberta. Only members of the research team, as well yourself and your child, will have access to this information. This information is kept for five years post publication, after which it is destroyed.

Freedom to withdraw:
I would like your child to help me with this study, but it is voluntary. Your child does not have to participate in the study. There will be no negative consequences if your child does not want to participate. Her grades and inclusion in class will not be affected. Your child's information will be removed from the study if your child changes her mind.. No questions will be asked. If your child wishes to withdraw, please contact Marianne at (780) 492-2004 or mclark1@ualberta.ca, or Dr. John Spence at (780) 492-1379 or jc.spence@ualberta.ca.

Questions or concerns:
If you have questions about this study, you may contact Marianne Clark or Dr. John Spence. You can also visit me in person at your child's school. If you have concerns about this study, you may also contact Dr. Marcel Bouffard who is the Chair of the Research Ethics Board for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta, 492-5910. Dr. Bouffard has no direct involvement in the study.

If you consent to your child's participation in this study, please complete and sign the attached informed consent form and return it to your child's school.

Regards,

Marianne Clark

Appendix II

Parental Informed Consent Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Part 1

Title of Project: **In their shoes: Understanding the physical activity experiences of young adolescent girls**

Investigator(s): **Marianne Clark, B.ASc. (Hons.) Master's Candidate, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada (780) 492-2004; mclark1@ualberta.ca**
Dr. John C. Spence, PhD, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, (780) 492-1379

Part 2 (to be completed by the parent/legal guardian of the research participant)

Do you understand that your child has been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you and your child read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet	Yes	No
Do you and your child understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you and your child had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that your child is free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that your child's information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you and your child? Do you understand who will have access to your child's information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Research Participant	Date	Witness
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name	Date	Printed Name

I give my permission for my child to participate in this study:

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Parent/Guardian	Date	Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

_____	_____
Signature of Investigator or Designee	Date

The information sheet must be attached to this consent form and a copy of both forms given to the participant.

Appendix III

Child Assent Script

Child Assent Script

Hello, my name is Marianne. I'm interested in what kids think about physical activity and sports. I'm going to ask you a few questions about what you like or don't like about physical activity. I'm also going to ask you to tell me about your best and worst memories of playing sports and playing with your friends. Does that make sense so far?

I want you to know that you don't have to answer my questions. I won't be upset if you don't want to do the interview and nothing bad will happen to your grades. It's completely up to you.

Also, if you decide later on when we're talking, that you don't want to talk anymore, that's ok, all you have to do is tell me and we'll stop. If I ask a question that you don't feel like answering, that's ok too. Just let me know. Does that sound ok?

I'd like to tape record the interview so I don't miss anything you say. But if there is anytime that you want the tape recorder turned off, we can turn it off. Does that make sense to you? Would you like to start the interview?

Appendix IV

Child Interview Guide

Child Interview Guide

1. When you hear the term 'physical activity' what sort of things come to mind? How would you describe physical activity in your own words?
2. When you have time after school and on the weekends, what sort of activities do you do? Probe for examples and details.
3. Do you do any sports or activities outside of school? If yes, what are they like for you? If no, is there anything that you would like to do? What is it that makes that activity or activities sound fun to you?
4. What sort of things do you like about playing or playing sports? Probe interesting ideas that arise from their answers.
5. What sort of things do you not like about playing or playing sports? Probe interesting ideas that arise from their answers.
6. Can you describe to me a favorite memory that you have of physical activity or sport? (Or the best thing that has ever happened to you in physical activity or playing with your friends or when playing a sport?)
7. Can you describe a time when you were playing with a friend or playing sports that didn't make you feel very good? Probe gently for details.
8. Has there ever been a time that you wanted to play a game/be active/play a sport but couldn't for some reason? If yes, what were some of those reasons? What was that experience like for you?
9. Can you describe a situation where being physically active would be very easy and fun for you?

10. Can you describe a situation where being physically active wouldn't be very much fun, or not easy for you? Probe for details.